Collaborative international projects

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COLLABORATIVE INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS:

INNOVATIONS, PRACTICES AND OUTCOMES

Taos Institute & Tilburg University Ph.D. Program in the Social and Behavioural Sciences

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Abstract

This research study focuses on three project case studies undertaken at Selkirk College, a public, post-secondary institution located in Castlegar, British Columbia, Canada. It is a qualitative study developed from interviews done with multiple participants involved in the Mir Centre for Peace, Guatemala Student Nursing Project and Republic of Georgia Workforce Development Initiative. All three projects include strong international components, involve participants from diverse organizational and geographical cultures, have been developed over several years, and have resulted in wide-ranging outcomes.

The purpose of the study is to engage in inquiry regarding project development, challenges and successes as evidenced by these case studies so as to consider best practices that can be applied to future project work within organizational settings. Findings from the interviews indicate that employing a multitude of specific strategies prior to, and during project implementation can affect the evolution of a project and its eventual success.

Several secondary themes are also prevalent in this project. The researcher explores tenets of social constructionism in regard to the relationship between the reader, interviewees, outside researchers in related fields, and other external voices. Opportunities are imbedded within the document text, in the form of narrative, visual imagery, metaphor and poetry, to engage the reader in a more direct, non-linear, sensory experience. In doing so, the reader potentially experiences being an equal "co-constructor" collaborating with a community consisting of diverse contributing voices. In effect, the actual research and dissertation process, as well as the evolving experience of the author, become part of the project itself, weaving a constantly shifting present and past reality into the jointly constructed narrative themes.

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Acknowledgements

This project became, over the four years it took to complete, a metaphorical and literal road trip of sorts: it spanned major professional and personal shifts against the backdrop of more than 15 countries across multiple continents. With appreciation, this dissertation is dedicated to the colleagues, friends and family members who generously accompanied me on the journey.

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Invention is the shaping spirit that re-forms fragments into new wholes, so that even what has been familiar has been made fresh.

- Jeanette Winterson

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

1.1 An Overview of the Project and an Invitation

Through two decades of work in post-secondary program and project development, curriculum internationalization, and institutional partnership building, I became increasingly intrigued by the many elements involved in collaborative project making. Specifically, I had participated in and observed the development of various complex, globally focused projects over the course of my career to that point, and had experienced both successes and challenges, in terms of process and outcomes. Although some projects evolved effectively and smoothly, achieving the desired objectives, others stalled, or were fraught with challenges and ultimately fell short of expectations.

After one particular experience with a collaborative project involving multiple college departments that evolved quite differently from our original intentions, I became very curious about the possible criteria contributing to project success, the motivations driving individual and group involvement, and the relationship between the projects, participants, and social contexts in which they occur. Essentially, I was motivated to gain a greater understanding of how we, as educators, can work together most effectively on multifaceted projects within the post-secondary settings in which we are immersed, and additionally, how these ideas can be applied to other types of organizational settings.

This research study focuses on three project case studies undertaken at Selkirk College, a public, post-secondary institution located in Castlegar, British Columbia, Canada. It is a qualitative study developed from interviews done with multiple participants involved in the Mir

Centre for Peace, Guatemala Student Nursing Project and Republic of Georgia Workforce Development Initiative. All three projects include strong international components, involve participants from diverse organizational and geographical cultures, have been developed over several years, and have resulted in far-reaching and positive outcomes.

Founders of the projects, as well as individuals who joined the projects later in the process, participated in this study. Each case study is described in detail within the dissertation, as well as the roles, experiences and perceptions of the individuals involved. That being said, the framework of the interview questions is based on an appreciative inquiry model, with an emphasis on open-ended, positive, and collaborative dialogue. Although the interviews were conducted used predetermined questions, participants were encouraged to extend their responses and provide additional insights they deem relevant. Themes drawn from the interviews are highlighted in the dissertation, and outcomes and potential best practices regarding organizational project construction are presented.

The first chapter of this dissertation provides personal background related to the development of the research project and discusses the cultural, geographical and educational context of the region in which the projects have evolved. Chapter Two reviews the literature relevant to the study, with a particular focus on social constructionist theory, appreciative inquiry, organizational culture, educational practice, creativity, and leadership choices leading to "good work" in organizational settings. Chapter Three discusses the development, implementation and practical issues regarding the study. The focus of Chapter Four is the participant responses; themes pertinent to the research questions are drawn out and possible interpretations are considered. Participant background is provided, with introductory quotations that give a sense of the interviewees' values, beliefs and interests. Theme summaries in Chapter Four consider the

main points discussed by participants relating to each of the seven designated themes and the project outcomes.

The final, concluding Chapter Five discusses best practices to consider when embarking on collaborative project making, recommends ideas for further research study, and integrates various subthemes related to the author's experiences and the evolution of this project. The Film Program project, which was the impetus for the development of the study four years ago, is discussed in relation to how the defined best practices could have been applied in order to enhance its chances of success.

Information from the interview data suggests that the application of multiple practices related to communication, planning, reflection, cross-cultural collaboration, member selection and other areas can result in positive project results. A rich area for further study would be studying other collaborative projects with the intention of creating a modifiable template of best practices and implementation timelines for organizations engaging in these types of work.

Several additional secondary themes also permeate this project. First, an effort has been made through the writing of this dissertation to explore concepts of social constructionist thought and appreciative inquiry (AI) as applied to the relationship between the reader, project participants, other "outside voices" such as researchers, artists and writers, as well as myself as author. Researcher and writer Ken Gergen (1994) describes AI as taking the idea of social construction to the positive extreme with its emphasis on metaphor, narrative, relational ways of knowing, language and its potential as a source of generative theory.

In this spirit, opportunities are imbedded within the document text, in the form of visual imagery, metaphor, poetry and personal stories (including those of this writer and the interviewees) to engage the reader in a potentially more direct, non-linear, sensory experience

than is typical for a formal document of this kind. In doing so, my intention is for the reader to experience being an equal "co-constructor" – more engaged participant than neutral observor - collaborating with a community consisting of diverse contributing voices. This research project and the resulting dissertation has been, in itself, a process of socially constructing meaning - between myself, the project participants, my advisor and others, and an attempt has been made to enlarge that circle to include the reader more fully.

John Shotter (2005) distinguishes between "withness" thinking and "aboutness" thinking, and posits that the former occurs as we engage relationally, rather than instrumentally with another though an awareness of - and sensitivity to - voice and embodied expression. This type of thinking evolves by focusing attention on "…the dynamic ways in which people use words in the course of their other actions, and on the subtle details of how, as their use of words unfolds in responsive relation to those to whom they are addressed…" (p.7). Through the inclusion of substantial direct quotations from the interviewees, relevant participant background information, and detailed information regarding the interview questions asked and the rationale for their inclusion, my goal was to elevate the reader's experience to one of "withness" thinking in relation to the people and projects of interest within this study. (Originally, I also planned to include recorded online voice clips of the participants as links in the text, but then decided against it since most readers will access only the print version.)

By integrating high quality colour photographs of the interviewees into the text, often engaged with their collaborators at the physical sites where their work took place, as well as background information it was intended that the participants become more fully known to the reader, rather than just names on a page. As much as possible within the limitations of the document, I wanted the reader to feel that they knew something of these individuals and their

projects beyond just reading recorded speech from the interviews - and to reflect on that experience.

An intriguing article by Luis Botella (2009) details a patient case study involving the relationship between music, meaning and emotion for an individual undergoing therapy during a traumatic period. Botella's premise is that the art form of music, combined with song lyrics, contributed substantially to the patient's ability to regulate his emotions, construct meaning from his previous experiences and anticipate the future positively. He notes that "…language is not just a means to make 'rational' sense of what happens to us, but also a powerful form of meaning construction in itself, with strong emotional implications and contributing to bridge the gap between the past and the future…" (p.80). By including poetry and quotations by artists, architects, film editors and others, as well as photography, I have attempted to access that emotional potential as it contributes to generative meaning construction, both for myself and the reader. At the same time, the intention is for the reader to consider how tenets relating to art and beauty might be related to organizational projects – a premise noted by several participants later in the dissertation.

Botella and Gallifa (1995) note that there is a dichotomy in ways of knowing, and discuss an evolving worldview which operates on the basis of cognitive complexity, constructionist epistemic assumptions and an organicist/contextualized perspective. Included within this conceptualization of ourselves and our world are other prevalent qualities: a greater tolerance for ambiguity; an interest in nuance and play; a desire for creative, aesthetic experience; an appreciation of organizational forms which are non-linear and non-sequential; and a willingness to move beyond what is traditional in the interest of exploring new modes of research, writing and thinking – as well as other activities. (For example, consider how such explorations have

been recently evident in Terrence Mallick's film *The Tree of Life* or Danish director Lars von Trier's *Melancholia*.)

Recently, I had an exchange with a friend who leads a department of philosophy and film at a university here in Montreal about traditional and emerging modes of research. Her opinion is that there is no single research-creation, and therefore no one single research-creation example. She notes, however, that it is critical to make clear in the writing of a piece that just as there is more than one way to conceive of language use, there is more than one way to conceive of research - and that variations are being employed. Through the writing of this dissertation, I have taken some liberties with traditional research-creation form and content in the creative interest of exploring ideas in potentially different ways. I invite the reader to also engage with this process.

1.2 The Purpose of the Introductory Chapter

This initial chapter serves to introduce the rationale, study research questions and context pertaining to the project. First, the introduction offers a personal reflection on the process of developing and implementing the study, and of producing the written dissertation. Next, as the case studies included in this project are deeply embedded within distinct educational, regional, historical and cultural contexts, there is an overview of these areas. To further enrich the reader's understanding of the projects and participants - as well as to add visual interest - photos have been included with the written text at various points in the document.

This project was designed to provide an opportunity for myself and others to extricate, discuss and refine ideas and practices in relation to collaborative projects. In the process, I hope

to uncover understandings that can be applied to the increasingly global, socially constructed projects we are engaged in as educators within post-secondary institutions. As well as informing the next phase of my own work in international education, it is my hope that the ideas expressed in this dissertation may support others embarking on collaborative institutional projects throughout all phases of the process.

1.3 Placing Myself (and My Garden) Within This Project

> *You cannot have innovation…unless you are willing and able to move through the unknown and go from curiosity to wonder.*
>
> - Dawna Markova, Educator, *The Open Mind*

In some ways, the process of envisioning, implementing and documenting this project is comparable to the experience of creating my own large scale, residential garden several years ago. I had always read that it was critical with landscape design to plan diligently on paper first and to restrain from buying plants without seeing first on a schemata what they would potentially look like. The implication was that buying plants on a whim would threaten the overall effect of unity and continuity in the completed design.

For years, I read books on garden design, plants and maintenance before getting the chance to finally build my own. In particular, while living for several years in the midst of the Arabian desert during a work assignment, I indulged in elaborate planting visioning and read late into the night about lush cottage garden plans, perennial favourites, vegetable combinations and rock wall construction. I fantasized for years, in fact, about my future green manifestation.

Finally, in 2006, the opportunity arose to construct my dream garden from scratch on two acres of rocky, sloped raw land surrounding our newly-built, architecturally-designed "B.C. Mountain Home". However, the question of where to begin was overwhelming and the five-foot deep, mosquito-filled trench behind the house (created when a landscaping caterpillar severed our new electrical lines during a rainstorm) served to escalate the challenge. Lucille, our highly allergic new age garden planner, made the situation even more formidable.

Favouring an ordered, traditional approach, Lucille carefully began to painstakingly plot out the garden with strings and requested that I resist purchasing plants on impulse. Her rationale for this was that spontaneous purchases selected too early in the process would create possible havoc with the formal planning process. However, ongoing appointments to get her metal tooth amalgams removed stalled progress and after two weeks, she and her five person crew had only managed to place a single solitary row of rocks along one edge of the proposed garden. I let Lucy and most of her crew go, except for one exceptionally talented stonemason from the West Indies.

Raw Land Prior to Garden Construction

As though released from a gardening restraining order, I proceeded to disregard all of Lucille's recommendations and buy plants on impulse at a plethora of garden centres within a 100 km vicinity over a four-week period. I joyfully chose trees, shrubs and perennials based purely on whether their colour, texture, scent, shape and flowers appealed to me, and paid little attention to potential groupings, seasonal sequencing, climactic or soil preferences.

By the end of July, the entire driveway was a chaotic blur of more than 300 potted plants, needing to be put into the ground if they were to survive the upcoming high August temperatures. Where to start? The project was overwhelming in its size and scope, and there were simply too many plants to deal with on my own. But I plunged in, aware that the task was at a critical phase, regardless of my resistance.

Beginning with the single row of rocks that Lucille had placed, I began turning and enriching the soil, chose a “feature” shrub that could serve as an anchor for other plants, and transferred it from pot to ground. The process continued, by focusing on one area at a time, imagining intriguing yet harmonious groupings, while continuing to expand my vision of the garden as a whole. Collaborating closely on the project with the one highly experienced gardener and stonemason I had hired, through ongoing discussion and joint labour, became a key part of the process as the creative possibilities were overwhelming.

The garden construction process developed organically, rather than sequentially. Certain plants seemed to just “fit” into a specific spot on the site, and an area of rockery and shrubs naturally developed from that current base of interest. Sections of the garden needing “filler” plants were largely ignored until the critical, more important areas such as the groupings along the walkway, were complete. We continued working on various sections, jointly inspired by our

efforts, and the masses of seemingly disparate potted plants found their way from the driveway to anchored earth.

Now, several years later, looking over it now from above, the garden forms an lush, eclectic, unified whole: a stunning revelation of living art manifested. And I am reminded of how the construction of my garden is very much like the evolution of this Ph.D. project and dissertation: the sheer magnitude of the project; the multitude of ideas I am intrigued by and am striving to weave coherently together; the conversations with others concerning the content and structure; the cognitive and physical labour required to persist through the project; and the deep satisfaction of "grounding" my ideas within the pages of this document. In her essay, *Imagination and Reality*, author Jeanette Winterson (1995) notes that "...the imaginative capacity is...made up of invention and discernment. Invention is the shaping spirit that re-forms fragments into new wholes, so that even what has been familiar has been made fresh" (p. 146).

The Completed Garden

1.4 **Reflections on the Process**

If we return to our original vision and hold that clearly in heart and mind as we engage each moment fully, the completed project will be an embodiment of this much more authentic expression of ourselves.

- Sarah Susanka, Architect

When speaking with a friend who had completed his Ph.D. in counselling psychology more than thirty years ago in the United States, I asked him to describe the research project and results. At the time, I was surprised when he replied that he didn't recall much about the actual findings. What he did remember, however, was his own experience of engaging with his subjects, gathering the information amidst communicative challenges, sitting with his own frustration and angst around organizing the massive amount of resource material and committing to an ongoing writing process that allowed him to synthesize and complete the project. To him, the conclusion of his dissertation represented a valuable marking of time in his own personal and professional evolution. At this point in my own project, I understand his perspective.

Sitting at my desk to continue the written dissertation phase, this time spent in the Taos-Tilburg Program seems like a rather winding road. My project itself has moved through a process of construction, in collaboration with my interviewees; my advisor, Dr. Mary Gergen; my friends and family; fellow Ph.D. students; and most intrinsically, with myself. As is fitting for a project embedded within this subject area, I consider all phases of my Ph.D. research and written dissertation to be socially constructed - a creative process brought into being through an extensive series of engaging, provocative and mutually supportive conversations.

The experiences I've had while in the program has been similar to many other mature learners; that is, my project - out of necessity - has been incorporated into a periodically chaotic life filled with full-time work in an academic setting, family, marriage and community. Although I originally envisioned a year of sabbatical spent writing my dissertation in colonial Mexico (punctuated by melodic mariachi music), reality has intervened and instead I sit planning tomorrow's workday. I've moved from my role as International Education Department Head at a

regional public college in British Columbia to a more senior position as Dean at a large-scale, global, private post-secondary provider in southeast Asia.

My new employment setting has provided a very different experience than my previous decade in the Canadian public post-secondary system. Operating in 12 countries, with more than 28 institutions, the organisation has developed highly marketable undergraduate and graduate level programming in the fields of business and design. Expansion is continuous, with several new campuses being developed each year, and the challenges associated with rapid growth in the sector are acutely present. Such challenges include quality assurance, consistency, transferability, cross-national accreditation, communication and faculty recruitment and retention.

While I've gained a wealth of new experience in terms of administering programming in an organization of this size, I am increasingly cognisant of the tensions inherent in generating lucrative results for shareholders while providing consistent academic quality to students. External accreditation organisations, as well as international benchmarking systems, help to ensure standards in this regard, but not to the highly regulated degree common to Canadian public institutions. Furthermore, many external quality assurance organisations are relatively inexperienced in fully evaluating campuses across a multitude of national boundaries, as it is a relatively recent and growing phenomena.

Accreditation bodies face tangible challenges when visiting and evaluating campuses in less familiar contexts: government regulations regarding post-secondary education differ widely across national borders; programming and instruction tend to be adapted to the specific economic, political and social characteristics of a particular region; and focused, intense visits by evaluators over short periods of time do not necessarily provide a comprehensive view of organizational standards. In turn, educational organizations frequently have difficulty balancing

the requirements of an accrediting body based in the country of the "home" institution with the federal education requirements issued by the country the "satellite campus" is located in. As cross-national educational conglomerates continue to grow, and the student market becomes increasingly more sophisticated and selective, quality assurance processes will become more regulated and defined. For now, however, gaps exist in the process, and it is often the consumer (the student) who suffers the losses in the short term.

Overall, I've realised that my time working within this type of private educational organisation is limited, by choice, as the paradigm it operates under is not well aligned with my personal goals and values. (As an example, a program developed under my supervision met global accreditation standards, in terms of content and total hours taught; however, it was later reduced by 30% in total hours with minimal inquiry into the quality related consequences of this decision.) With an extensive academic and experiential background in education, and post-secondary education specifically, I have found that this for-profit educational provider has been less likely to respond to the recommendations of its academic staff than its financial advisors.

This dissertation project, more than any other influence in my life during the past decade - including my employment - has necessitated that I focus on priorities, face challenges, and allow those things which are no longer helpful to fall away. At a turning point in my career, I am gradually making the transition from employment in a fairly traditional educational institutional setting to a more flexible, independent mode of work integrating educational consulting, research, teaching, writing, travel and art.

In important ways, this project, particularly the interview and writing components, has been a catalyst and a container (albeit metaphorical) for the transformative changes I have undergone, and am continuing to experience. This doctoral process forms a semantic bridge of sorts - a link

serving to synthesize and make sense of my colleagues' and my past work experiences within a post-secondary environment, while considering which of our practices and choices could serve us best as co-constructing partners into the future.

It was following the interviews, which involved interacting with my respondents directly using an interview structure and questions based on appreciative inquiry, that I realised how affecting the conversations had been for both myself and several of the interviewees. Having the opportunity to engage with others about projects deeply important to them, and participating in their understandings on the process was, at times, profound. I began to see the interviews as mutually powerful: not only did the conversations help to consolidate meaning and inject a renewed sense of purpose and clarity for the interviewees, but they gave me a deep sense of satisfaction in being a part of such an authentic and creative experience.

Writing the dissertation has been an equally important - and frequently challenging - process. In Michael Ondaatje's *The Conversations - Walter Murch and the Art of Editing Film* (2002), the Booker Prize-winning author shares his observations on writing as a non-linear, periodically chaotic experience:

> *There are some writers who have a plan before they sit down for those years of writing a book - they have a concept or plot that's very certain. I seem to have none of those assurances. I'm much more uncertain, insecure almost in the way that I'm continually being fed and diverted by the possibilities from the world around me - chance anecdotes overheard, the texture within a rumour - as much as by what my research reveals. For those four or five years, I collect such things, and they fall into a form or a shape or a situation I have established...I do this till*

I have a complete but rough first draft, by which time I've essentially discovered the story (p.38).

Many writers, including myself, can identify with Ondaatje's assertion that a large written project often takes a circuitous route from beginning to completion, and that the "story" is discovered as the process unfolds. Even with a well defined outline at the start of this dissertation project, the structure, order and content of this work has been diverted by a myriad of influences along the way: new books and articles directly and indirectly related to the subject area; individuals contributing additional ideas to the general themes of the project; changes in home, employment and family; and shifts in my own interests and understandings. At times, sections of this document have progressed at a relatively slow pace, as I have worked to balance the assimilation of new understandings with my own experiences, and then convey them in written form.

The poet Ranier Maria Rilke eloquently expresses this creative, potentially frustrating period of processing and active waiting in *Selected Letters to a Young Poet* (1934). In the piece, he suggests that remaining attentively open to the experience of cognitive dissonance eventually facilitates understanding. That is, uncertainty - prevalent when working on any large undertaking whether a dissertation or international institutional project - may provide just the impetus needed for transformation.

...try to love the questions themselves like locked rooms and like books written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then, gradually without knowing it, live along some distant day

into the answer.

Later, in *Selected Letters of Ranier Maria Rilke* (1960), he says:

> *What is required is that we love the difficult and learn to deal with it. In the difficult are the friendly forces, the hands that work on us. Right in the difficult we must have our joys, our happiness, our dreams...*

As well as documenting the findings of my research and the resulting discussion concerning international project work, the dissertation reflects the evolution of my own experience. Perhaps that is the most powerful form writing can take: it becomes both the medium through which a journey of intellectual discovery unfolds and the tangible documentation of that same experience. Author Joan Didion states, "I write entirely to find out what I'm thinking, what I'm looking at, what I see, and what it means."

While I agree that greater self-understanding is a primary motivation driving the efforts of writers, it is true that many also aspire to empower others through the process. As Canadian writer Lorri Neilsen comments (2002), "Both the process and products of writing develop an author-ity that expands and extends voice, engenders courage and inspires a conviction to affect change in personal and professional contexts." It is due to these influences, according to Neilsen, that writing plays a critical role in the development of a sense of agency - of being able to consciously initiate and sustain action in the world.

1.5 College Project Work as Impetus for this Dissertation - The International Digital Film Program

Like many of my colleagues employed within a post-secondary setting as faculty, administrators and staff, I have been involved in a plethora of special projects throughout my career. (I designate them as "special", since they are initiatives that are implemented within an institutional setting, but are situated somewhat outside of a formalized job description, institutional mandate or regularly assigned work.) Such projects include the development of an international student centre, a teacher education post-graduate program, international institutional partnerships, student exchange program, cultural festivals, a student anti-poverty initiative, and global issues lecture series. However, the event that motivated me to enter the Taos-Tilburg Ph.D. Program and to focus on collaborative international projects was my work on a new International Digital Film Program at Selkirk College (IDFP) in 2007.

I had been producing international film festivals in Nelson for several years prior to creating the IDFP. My first experience was with the Selkirk Global Film Fest integrating film, live music, guest speakers and food from specific cultures, followed by the Amnesty International Film Fest held from 2000-2006. The latter focused on human rights documentaries shot around the world and featured guest directors on site. Most of the film events were highly successful, in that they attracted a large audience and received positive feedback in the community and media. It was inspiring for me to develop the festivals, work on the press releases and posters, interact with the filmmakers, choose the films, and fully experience them with the audience. To offer this meaningful art to the community was energizing and engaging, and the feedback from audiences was positive with tickets to several of the events selling out. It therefore seemed like to natural

progression to create and produce a post-graduate diploma program in digital film at Selkirk College.

The new program was innovative within the setting of Selkirk College in that it was a joint venture between the International Education Department and the Digital Media Department. Titled, “International Digital Film”, the program combined internationalized curriculum, globally experienced faculty and student study abroad experiences, with technical courses such as digital video, screenwriting, editing, camera techniques, lighting and sound. The two colleagues I collaborated with on the program, both employed in Digital Media as the Chair and Coordinator respectively, offered a wealth of technical expertise, media program experience and industry contacts, while I brought my understanding of curriculum and program development, international connections, and passionate interest in film to the project.

Through the development, approval process and implementation of the new program, we encountered a diverse range of both frustrating challenges and encouraging successes. It gradually became clear, for example, that our understandings of the main program content, purpose, and emphasis of the program were quite different; that the divisions of labour between us had not been defined accurately enough; that having the day-to-day operation of the program spread between two campuses added to the logistics issues; and that the two departments had distinctly different working “cultures”.

While I was keen to maintain an international focus to the program, in terms of the choice of films used as models in the film studies, editing and screenwriting courses, my co-founders were more interested in supporting the concept of independent films, regardless of a global perspective. They also didn't share the same degree of interest I had in attracting instructors with

international experience in filmmaking and instruction, nor of having the students participate in an international film project as part of their required courses.

Furthermore, although our roles were initially deemed equal and collaborative, it became clear soon after the program began, due to professional and personal challenges that the other co-founders were experiencing, that I would carry much of the administrative load during the first year. This became particularly apparent when the program started to experience the inevitable growing pains of the first semester. This workload involved dealing with the usual program related challenges including differing student/faculty expectations of projects, budget management, faculty contracts, class scheduling and human resources constraints. My office, as well as the physical location of the other programs I managed, was based on a different campus in a neighbouring community - a fact which further strained administrative communication. The other founders and I mutually decided, following our successful completion of the inaugural year of the program, that it would reside solely within the School of Digital Media as of year two, and I turned my focus to several new projects within the International Education Department.

Through the following academic year, I found myself increasingly intrigued by what had worked well through the IDFP project development process to foster the successes, and what could have been improved. How were my perceptions of the project different from my colleagues, and how could have we facilitated greater communication and thus, smoother collaboration as the program unfolded? Were my perceptions of the experience similar to those of my colleagues or radically different? It seemed as though these types of focused conversations didn't take place between us in a way that was helpful during, or following, the project process. Although the project had been highly collaborative in some ways, it seemed as though the conversations that would have been most constructive never occurred.

1.6 Selkirk College - Defining the Context

> *Human beings are like rivers: the water is one and the same in all of them but every river is narrow in some places, flows swifter in others; here it is broad, there still, or clear, or cold, or muddy, or warm.*
>
> - Leo Tolstoy, *Resurrection*

Situated at a natural occurring confluence between the Columbia and Kootenay Rivers and framed by an extensive mountain range, the main Selkirk College campus is distinguished by a spectacular natural environment and a diverse regional cultural heritage. Selkirk College is a public, post-secondary institution located in south central British Columbia, and an accredited member of the Association of Canadian Community Colleges. Officially created through a public referendum in 1967, Selkirk holds the distinction of being the first regional college in the province and one of only six serving mainly rural communities.

Selkirk College - Castlegar, British Columbia, Canada

The Selkirk College region was originally inhabited by the Sinixt (Interior Salish) and Kootenai First Nations peoples who lived, fished and traded in the area. Important early settlers arriving late in the 19th century included a large community of Doukhobours: pacifist Christians from Russia, seeking freedom from persecution and a communal-oriented life within this geographically rich environment. Interestingly, the Doukhobours were sponsored financially in their migration to Canada by the writer and philosopher, Leo Tolstoy, who keenly supported their practices of non-violence, vegetarianism and communal living. Tolstoy donated the proceeds of his novel, *Resurrection*, to this cause. (It is noteworthy that the novel's themes focus on the relationship of social service to individual and community development, as well as the hypocrisy exhibited, according to the author, by traditional religions.)

The Sinixt and Doukhobours participated in much of the early development of the area, followed by new immigrants and migrants from other regions of Canada originating from Portugal, Italy and many other parts of Europe. As the region is laden with extensive ore deposits and vast forest resources, the landscape has been a critical factor in settlement, particularly of Europeans. This complex cultural heritage continues to permeate and affect the College and surrounding community. International student exchanges, sister city relationships, ethnic festivals, specialty businesses and spiritual practices originating from these cultural groups enliven and enrich the Kootenay community.

The generic term "community" denotes concepts such as interdependent living, shared beliefs and needs, common resources and cohesiveness. The relationship between community and landscape is deeply intertwined in many contexts, and this is certainly the case in the Kootenay region, among the various facets of cultural and geographical communities that exist

there. As Marilyn James of the Sinixt Nation in Castlegar, and participant in this project, stated during our interview, "You develop community by beginning to examine the aspects of landscape." Undoubtedly, the geographical landscape of the region, the various Kootenay cultural communities, the development of Selkirk College and the work and individuals within it - each aspect is interconnected and mutually affected by the others.

1.7 The Selkirk College Educational Experience

A range of educational programming is offered through Selkirk College on a total of eight campuses in the communities of Castlegar, Nelson, Trail, Grand Forks, Nakusp and Kaslo. Programs are provided through several academic schools, including Adult Basic Education, Business and Aviation, Digital Media and Music, Health and Human Services, Hospitality and Tourism, Industry and Trades Training, Kootenay School of the Arts, Renewable Resources, University Arts and Sciences and Selkirk International. The college has developed a strong reputation in many program areas and has developed specialized expertise in niche programs such as Contemporary Music, Geographic Information Systems, Hotel Management, Professional Aviation, Peace Studies, English Language Teacher Education and New Media.

These niche programs developed over time in distinct and interesting ways. Several (such as Geographic Information Systems and Hotel Management) evolved due to the particular natural environment of the region and its appeal to tourists and convention groups. Contemporary Music, an extremely popular and unique program in Canada, was founded after an American graduate of the Berklee School of Music happened to relocate to the Nelson area and persuaded several former colleagues to join him. The Peace Studies Program was a brainchild of the

primary group of people engaged in the MIR Peace Centre and is aligned with the cultural, social and educational goals of that project.

Approximately 2500 students attend the college annually, with the majority (about 70%) coming from the Selkirk College region. With the average student age being 27 years old, there has been a continual trend over the past few years of an increasing number of mature students attending college programs (Selkirk College Enrolment Management Report, 2008). Reasons for this shift in student age include a variety of inter-related factors such as regional unemployment rates, demand for skill upgrading and retraining, enhanced part-time learning opportunities at Selkirk College, innovative new program offerings and the increased tendency of mid-career workers to change professions and upgrade credentialing.

1.8 College Strategic Directions - Defining Principles and Priorities

Selkirk College is, at its highest level, directed by a board of governors. The board, in collaboration with the college president and other stakeholders, is responsible for approving the ongoing and long-term goals of the college, including the defined mission, vision, values and strategic directions of the institution.

These guiding principles, determined through an inclusive, college-wide visioning process, were assembled in a detailed policy document entitled, *Selkirk College at the Confluence: Our Renewed Vision to 2011*. (See Figure 1.0 and Figure 1.1) Through operational planning and reporting completed annually by every college division and school, the principles in this document are defined, highlighted and put into action. By reviewing the operational plans individually, and as a comprehensive whole, the college ensures that the strategic directions are

being addressed and that actions taken contribute to the achievement of the mission and vision goals. Operational plans across schools identify opportunities for collaborative and complementary activities.

Figure 1.0 Selkirk at the Confluence: Our Renewed Vision to 2011

Mission

Selkirk College will develop empowered, effective citizens through rewarding educational and life experiences that are built on our Region's distinct identity.

Vision

Our Vision is to be a Regional Community College that inspires, engages and enables learners to be valuable contributors to their communities and to society as a whole. Recognizing the value of mutually beneficial relationships, we will provide collaborative leadership in the communities we serve. This Vision is rooted in our vivid sense of place that is more than mere location. It is a composite of our people, history, culture, values, lifestyle and landscape. It is a strength that will define us, give us direction and provide us with unique opportunities.

Values

1. Quality - To provide quality in our teaching, service and programs.

2. Access - To open doors for learners and build understanding and acceptance of diverse learner needs.

3. Discovery - To inquire about the world and our place in it; address challenges with creative solutions; and inspire the imagination, spirit and mind.

4. Environmental Responsibility - To conserve our natural environment and use natural resources responsibly.

5. Healthy Relationships - To cultivate healthy relationships; connect to the local and global community; and value the contributions and celebrate the accomplishments of learners, employees, alumni and community.

6. Positive College Environment - To maintain a positive and healthy environment where employees and learners can contribute and develop.

7. Integrity - To uphold honesty, respect, fairness and equality in all of our pursuits.

8. Inclusive Culture - To foster harmony and understanding; and celebrate our heritage, artistry and diversity.

9. Leadership - To lead by serving with enthusiasm, inspiration and purpose; by responding to the needs of learners and the community; and by providing informed, effective direction for the future.

Figure 1.1 Selkirk College Strategic Directions

Our ***Strategic Directions*** define how Selkirk College will address the future and continue to grow as an exemplary Regional Community College. These directions will guide our planning of new initiatives and will provide the basis for our accountability. Education is our primary undertaking, and all of our strategies will support this overarching endeavour. As we develop operational plans to achieve results in each of these strategic areas, we will use four key themes – Relationships, Place, Discovery, and World – to guide our decisions.

Key Themes:

• **Relationships:** Each strategy will involve and positively influence our **relationships** with students, staff and community.

• **Place:** Our distinct sense of **place** will make a significant contribution to our strategies.

• **Discovery:** As we build on our strengths to develop our new strategies we will consider the process of **discovery** as a key component of an innovative learning environment.

• **World:** We are increasingly engaged in the larger **world** and will develop strategies with an international perspective.

1. Teaching and Learning: Building on our Foundation

Exemplary teaching and outstanding learning experiences are and will continue to be the fundamental activities of Selkirk College. Our learning opportunities will be responsive to diverse learner needs. Interdisciplinary studies and applied research will be important new enterprises for our College and will provide enhanced learning experiences for students.

2. The Student Experience: A Renewed Focus

Positive and productive relationships are integral to learner success. We know that these relationships begin when contact is first made and continue through to alumnus. We will ensure that learning is paired with College life experiences that engage students with our communities and the natural environment.

3. Employees: Key to Our Success

Employees are essential to the success of learners and our College. The well-being of our employees and the environment in which we work together will be enhanced with opportunities for personal and professional development. Our plans will include a succession blueprint for the College.

4. Leadership: A Commitment to Learners and Communities

We have specific assets and resources that will continue to make an effective and positive contribution to community renewal. Some new highlights in this regard are the Selkirk

Geospatial Research Centre, the MIR Centre for Peace and the Kootenay School of the Arts. Selkirk College will be recognized as an effective leader and partner in community development.

5. Internationalization: Bringing Selkirk to the World and the World to Selkirk

Relationships with learners, organizations and communities throughout the world foster greater cross-cultural understanding and awareness, while enhancing learning and program opportunities. Selkirk College will build strong international relationships, create opportunities for international experiences and enhance capacity for international programming. (Renewed Vision Document Final Version Approved by Board of Governors February 22, 2005.)

1.9 Strategic Planning and Project Development

Quality is never an accident; it is always the result of intelligent effort.

- John Ruskin, Writer and Critic

The inception of new projects within organizational settings does not occur in isolation; rather, projects evolve through a process involving multiple phases, including careful consideration of defined strategic directions. Institutions such as Selkirk College, which consistently highlight, review and promote mission, vision, values and strategic directions through formal and informal modes, provide exposure of these principles to potential project participants. Through increasing internalization and expression of an effective strategic plan by individuals within a system, general awareness multiplies and the likelihood increases that new project ideas will reflect aspects of the plan.

However, it is rare for strategic plans to solely drive successful organizational projects; rather, such plans are more apt to inform and enhance new initiatives. Ultimately, projects may be implemented by committees formally tasked with the responsibility of achieving a set outcome, but for a complex project to succeed, that committee must contain individuals exhibiting a degree of personal interest, and ideally, passion, for the work.

Given the inherent challenges in bringing any complicated task involving varied stakeholders to fruition, participants often require more than externalized goals to sustain their efforts; it is internal, personal motivation which provides "staying power" and ongoing interest in any difficult task. (For example, I can't help but make a parallel between this premise of internal motivation and its critical importance to my dissertation process. Although the promise of officially achieving the doctorate degree and attaining other possible associated outcomes are highly attractive to me, they are not solely sufficient to maintain my drive over the months needed to complete this project. It is the internal motivators that have kept me moving forward in the face of changing external demands: my personal interest in the project subject matter, the commitments made to interviewees and others, and the potential contributions offered to the field by the findings.)

Later sections of this dissertation focus in detail on the impact of strategic planning on project development in relation to the three institutional case studies included in this study. At this point, it is important to note that Selkirk College has a well-developed and current strategic plan that encompasses the unique academic, cultural and geographical characteristics of the community and region. Psychologists Csikszentmihalyi, Berg and Nakamura (2003) posit that to thrive, a school must meet ethical guidelines embodied in a mission that "expresses the spirit of a community". The researchers go on to define this as a fundamental, implicit contract between the

institution and the wider community, a means by which internal stakeholders (students, staff and faculty) and external stakeholders (community members, accreditation bodies, higher education domains) are aligned.

The Selkirk College plan was created through a collaborative, institutional-wide process that was open to students, staff and faculty across departments and levels, as well as community members. Margaret Wheatley, in *Leadership and the New Science*, states that an organizational plan only becomes real to people if they have had the opportunity to directly interact with it. “It doesn't matter how brilliant or correct the plan is - it simply doesn't work to ask people to sign on when they haven't been involved in the planning process” (2006, p. 68). The challenge, however, is to ensure that an invitation to engage in the planning process results in full participation, and to communicate the content of the plan throughout the levels of the organization in the years following its inception.

CHAPTER TWO - Review of the Literature

2.1 The Purpose of This Chapter

The literature review section serves to situate this study within the fundamental, current and evolving work relevant to this project. The chapter includes an overview of social construction and appreciative inquiry theory and practice, which are interrelated and provide a foundational framework for the purpose, method and discussion of this study. Other key topic areas discussed include organizational culture, social constructionist influences on education, creativity and chaos, and leadership choices affecting "good work" within organizational settings. By seeking to integrate the ideas and practice of others engaged in these areas, it is possible to highlight findings and emerging questions indicated by this study.

2.2 A Social Constructionist Framework

> *Between every separate thing...there exists another world, an invisible world where all this separation and distance is embraced. The space between seems empty to the eye yet to the imagination it is vibrant with pathways toward beauty.*
>
> - John O'Donohue, Philosopher/Poet, *Beauty*

> *Can beauty be found within every organization – even if embroiled in conflict?*
>
> - David Cooperrider, Organizational Consultant

The essential premise of social constructionism is that the human understanding of reality, and all constructs within it, are created mutually in relationship through dialogue. For more than four decades, theorists and practitioners have explored ideas related to social constructionism and applied them to a range of fields including education, psychology, organizational behaviour and sociology. A pivotal early work in the evolution of social constructionist thought written by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966), *The Social Construction of Reality*, proposed that ongoing functional interactions within society gradually create a shared vision of reality encompassing knowledge, roles and habitual behaviours.

These mutual understandings within a social context are, out of necessity, facilitated primarily through language - the critical tool through which we co-create, clarify and coordinate our world. As Wittgenstein notes (1953), language is a relational medium enabling us to do things within a social context, and not just a representation of the world "out there". Knowledge resulting from language is imbedded within and inseparable from the environmental, familial, experiential, historical and social cultures in which we operate. Words are essential tools that allow members of a culture to move about and coordinate relations with one another (Bloor, 1976). Rather than external, physical reality dictating the terms by which the world is understood, it is the reverse: the world is perceived according to the language - constructed in tandem with relationally embedded understandings - that we have in place (Cooperrider, Barrett, & Srivastva, 1995).

Kenneth Gergen, a leading proponent of the social constructionist movement, and a researcher who has written extensively on the subject and its related themes for decades, has described all imperial truth as being communally based and constructed, culturally and

historically situated, and co-created through our relations with others (2001, 2004 & 2006). In our ever-globalizing, post-modern, and highly complex world, a social constructionist framework can provide a way of understanding "the real, the rational and the good" as existing as a continuum of multiple representations rather than as a narrow dichotomy of one choice versus the other. In *From Mind to Relationship: The Emerging Challenge* (2001), Gergen defines "reasoning well" as the process of fully participating in relationship in order to come to understanding, instead of stepping outside of relationship for a private moment. It is a collaborative, mutually affecting act as opposed to an isolated, intellectualized exercise.

Margaret Wheatley (2006) notes that all phenomena exist through and due to relationship: "This is a world of process, the process of connecting, where 'things' come into temporary existence because of relationship (p.69). This perspective echoes that of Fritjof Capra (1975), who proposes a whole systems view of the world, based on interdependence and composed not of separate objects but of a complex set of relationships (p. 129).

A social constructionist framework has profound implications for activities occurring within educational settings - in the way knowledge is understood to be communicated and exchanged; in the selection of particular knowledge and its defined purpose; in the learning activities planned for the classroom; and in the type and quality of relationship between the "teacher" and "learner". Gergen notes (2001) that the traditional view of education is that it should "prepare the individual to participate productively in society, and to contribute as a responsible citizen to the democratic process" (p. 8). The key premise here is that education is historically highly individualized, rather than collaborative and relationship based, and creates a tangible gap between "self" and "other". According to the individualist tradition, student performance is

evaluated competitively against that of others according to fixed curricular standards that were established at some prior point in time.

It is encouraging that substantial growth has occurred in educational theory and practice over the past half century, with a greater emphasis being placed on highly active, collaborative learning permeating systems at all levels. Gergen (2001), for example, acknowledges the value of incorporating instructional practices such as authentic assessment and service learning, as well as imbedding learning within a broader social context less focused on individual failure or success.

Literacy educator Paulo Freire's revolutionary work, beginning in the 1940's can be considered an early precursor to social constructionist thinking in relation to education. His approach is based on the concept of "praxis": a continual cycle of constructive dialogue, informed reflection and action leading to understanding and social change. Within Freire's framework, learners, as co-creators with the teacher within the classroom, are held accountable for assessing and directing their own learning needs.

Freire rejects the traditional "banking" model of education, in which a teacher "deposits" knowledge into the students, and the unequal power balance inherent in such a relationship. According to his interpretation of the concept, implicit within the banking concept is the assumption of a dichotomy between human beings and the world. That is, a person is merely in the world, not *with the world* or *with others* - the individual is spectator rather than re-creator" (Freire, 1970, p.75). Freire perceives the classroom as a microcosm of the larger world: teachers, as leaders, support the liberation of students by fully engaging with them in dialogue and through action directed toward the needs of their particular social context, and not by imposing their own

choices upon them. Furthermore, if such imposition occurs, it results in manipulation and oppression, rather than liberation.

Through a dialogical process, individuals become increasingly critical thinkers, able to act upon their internal and external realities rather than being acted upon. "Critical thinking contrasts with naive thinking, which sees historical times as a weight, a stratification of the acquisitions and experiences of the past, from which the present should emerge normalized and well behaved. For the naive thinker, the important thing is accommodation to this normalized today. For the critical thinker, the important thing is the continuing transformation of reality, on behalf of the continuing humanization of men (Freire, 1970, p.81). Gradually, as critical awareness grows, people shift from a state of submergence in regard to their relationship to reality - to one of reflexive awareness or co-participation.

Inherent in a social constructionist ontology of the way things are, and how we come to comprehend and move within this world-view, is an acceptance of fluidity and change. Reality is perceived as being multiple and local, rather than singular and transcendental and suppressing other realities; furthermore, reality is therefore contestable in that diverse views necessarily exist (Hosking, 2004). Rather than existing as a fossilized summative knowledge base, understanding comes through engagement and negotiation, and through this process, certainty becomes replaced with a sense of potentiality (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999). Shotter (1993) similarly views all socially significant dimensions of reality as being constructed in joint action within the flow of relational activities and practices.

Intriguing parallels exist between tenets of social constructionist and traditional Buddhist thought: concepts such as fluidity, relationship, and potentiality are apparent in both. Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, in *Meditation in Action* (1969) observes that individuals are not separate

from the environment and external phenomena; rather, they coexist together. Individuality is based on relativity. He describes the teacher-student relationship, using Zen terminology, as "the meeting of two minds".

> *And when the right situation is created, then suddenly the teacher and pupil are not there anymore. The teacher acts as one entrance and the pupil acts as another, and when both doors are open there is a complete emptiness, a complete oneness between the two....The actual moment is very simple, very direct....Two minds become one (p. 60).*

Ken Gergen and Dian Marie Hosking (2006) explore these parallels in depth, making the observation that both Buddhist and social constructionist modes of thought provide the opportunity to view the nature of reality more objectively, perceive multiple possibilities, and experience greater empowerment through conscious choice. At the core of exploring these lines of thought is the notion that all claims to knowledge are culturally and historically situated. Increased freedom lies in the ability to understand the potential beyond one objective truth - to ask questions, to entertain alternatives, and to clearly observe the imbedded patterns of thoughts and concepts that often capture our attention. This opportunity to question ingrained ideas is a major theme in the work of Tibetan Buddhist nun Pema Chodron, who teaches in the lineage of Chogyam Trungpa:

> *...we could begin to notice our opinions just as we notice that we're thinking in meditation. This is an extremely helpful practice because we have a lot of opinions and*

we tend to take them as truth. But actually they aren't truth...If we can see our opinions as opinions and even for a moment let them go, and then come back to the immediacy of our experience, we may discover a brand new world, that we have new eyes and new ears (2005, p. 134-135).

We cling to a fixed idea of who we are and it cripples us. Nothing and no one is fixed. Whether the reality of change is a source of freedom or a source of horrific anxiety makes a significant difference...the fixed idea that we have about ourselves as solid and separate from one another is painfully limiting (2007, p. 25).

2.3 Chaos, Creativity and Social Constructionism

...in making a film you're trying to get the most interesting orchestration of all these elements, which, like music, need to be harmonic yet contradictory. If they're completely contradictory, then there's chaos. If, on the other hand, all the instruments play the same notes - if they're too harmonic, in other words - yes, there's coherence, but I'm bored after a few minutes.

- Walter Murch, Film Editor/Director, *Walter Murch and the Art of Editing Film*

Physicists and chemists Prigogine and Stengers, in *Order Out of Chaos* (1984) note that what we name reality is revealed through our participation in active construction. The researchers bridge constructs between the hard sciences, social sciences and philosophy by considering the effect of interjecting different forms of systems, including social, with new and even discordant

information. It is through mutual engagement and "acting upon" fresh information in ways that are functional and relevant to the situation, that novel understandings and behaviours are formed and begin to permeate a particular milieu. The authors suggest that science should emphasize the human state as being imbedded, rather than distant from nature and that we should perceive our human experience as being "closer to the universe" rather than being "on the margin of the margin".

In *The End of Certainty* (1997), Prigogine challenges the Darwinian view of determinism, which defines the world as a complex, mechanistic oriented machine situated apart from the human experience. Instead he emphasizes an organic, potentially less alienating view in which natural laws are subject to creative, unpredictable influences producing change. In fact, in order to maintain stability, systems must constantly change - a view that is antithetical to the concept of homeostasis, the common defining benchmark of health.

He cites the examples of music and sculpture to illustrate how "time oriented" art forms of high quality (such as a Bach concerto), although generally guided by strict rules of execution, are produced through the interjection of new and unpredictable phenomena. The resulting creations then allow us to perceive our reality in alternative ways that can be useful and enlightening – essentially becoming, in themselves, further catalysts of change. As Jeanette Winterson states in her essay, *Imagination and Reality (1995):*

> *To suggest that the writer, the painter, the musician, is the one out of touch with the real world is a doubtful proposition. It is the artist who must apprehend things fully, in their own right, communicating them not as symbols but as living realities with the power to move (p. 145).*

Prigogine's assertions parallel the contrasts Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) make between the concepts of logical positivism and socio-rationalism: the former concept asserts that social phenomena are enduring, stable and replicable, while the latter assumes a social order which is unstable and organic. "Social phenomena are guided by cognitive heuristics, limited only by human imagination: the social order is a subject matter capable of infinite variation through the linkage of ideas and action" (p.139). This builds on Hoffman's (1981) definition of social systems as being in a constant state of "discontinuous change", exhibiting tendencies that are non-linear, evolutionary and self-organizing.

Rossi (1989) considers human creativity to be an intermittedly chaotic process occurring as an individual selectively chooses and amplifies fluctuations in thought, and then molds them into coherent states. Knowledge, whether on an individual or group level, develops through a complex web or network with multiple modes of connection; it is non-linear, dynamic and pluralistic (p.2). Rossi declares "all boundaries to be at risk" as de-differentation and hybridization affect cultural categories, identities and certainties. As new forms of interdependence and cooperation permeate the myriad of social systems we are all engaged in, a "worldwide reconfiguration" is taking place.

An intriguing application of complexity theory is apparent in Frank Barrett's article, *Cultivating an Aesthetics of Unfolding: Jazz Improvisation as a Self-Organizing System* (2000). In it, Barrett suggests that systems (whether of the jazz or organizational variety) are most creative when operating under the influence of both order and chaos, and that, ultimately, it is the combination of both states that generates the potential for new patterns and transformation. This process of change requires active co-participation and an "appreciative way of knowing" on the

part of the players, "...an aesthetic that values surrender and wonderment over certainty, affirmative sense making over problem solving, listening and attunement over individual isolation" (p. 229). Participants are not passive, but are actively sensing, feeling and thinking, and receptive to a dynamic of emergence and surprise. They are willing to let go of the familiar, surrender to the possibilities generated through risk, and operate under the (uncommon) assumption that errors and anxiety may be markers of evolving discoveries.

Extending this premise, Margaret Wheatley (2006) likens a social system to an ecosystem, for which growth can only occur as a result of being "off balance": a state that may be considered either a threat to stability that needs to be stifled - or an opportunity for growth and transformation. Wheatley posits that stasis, balance, equilibrium are temporary states, while in contrast, truly enduring processes are dynamic, adaptive and creative. Unlike closed systems which gradually lose momentum and decay, healthy systems are open and responsive to the same self-organizing dynamics as other life (p.96).

As a researcher, educator and project manager, I am interested in the somewhat amorphous boundaries between individual and collective systems, their external environments, and potentiality – the overlapping fringes where creative innovation often percolates. Based on my experience, and that of many others, it seems unequivocal that some chaos and uncertainty are essential to generate the innovation and energy needed to bring about transformative change. The essential question, however, is one of strategic application: How is productive creativity recognized, fostered and utilized – in a practical, 'real world' way - within ourselves, others and the social systems in which we exist?

2.4 Leadership and "Good Work" Within Organizational Settings

Howard Gardner (2002), in *Good Work, Well Done,* states that academic research has neglected the actual experience of work, particularly in relation to how individuals perceive daily occurrences on the job; what employee goals and concerns are; which specific strategies they rely on; how they manage technological challenges; and what their responses are to ethical dilemmas. Essentially, Gardner is interested in knowing about the place work occupies in the overall life experience of the individual. He notes that during this period of rapid social, political and economic change, such research is critical to supporting personal and organizational health.

Gardner has collaborated with fellow psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi to explore the perceptions of employees and define experiences of "good work". He suggests that individuals (and employers) need to consider several factors when determining whether a position, and an organization, is an appropriate, satisfying fit. Gardner notes that it is key to define an employee's personal mission: Originally, and currently, does the work still stand? Is the work aligned with who the individual truly is – in terms of values, interests and goals – and, if not, what work is better suited to meeting those needs?

Csikszentmihalyi, Berg and Nakamura, in *Enabling Good Work in Higher Education* (2003), also consider the employee's personal engagement with work. They posit that good work happens in organizations when three conditions are met: the work meets best practices within the domain of the field; employee efforts are a response to societal needs; and workers experience their efforts as meaningful and enjoyable. When components of these conditions are

lacking, when organizational goals are ambiguous or contradictory, or when feedback is erratic and confusing, employees begin to lose enthusiasm and become either stressed or bored.

To counteract this, Barrett (1995) suggests that organizations make a concerted effort to create contexts that allow members to continually learn and take on new challenges, question their own assumptions, participate in engaging dialogue and create new possibilities for the future. Employees must be able to explore and extend their own capabilities on the job, and organizational leaders must provide opportunities for them to do so. Similarly, Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2000) note that value is added to organizations when leaders foster a way of working that liberates an individual and collective sense of power. When people are consciously working toward the best they can be – and meeting the ideals they consider crucial – the organization becomes empowered at all levels. High performance then becomes the norm, in the face of change and possibility, rather than crisis.

2.5 Appreciative Inquiry: An Alternative Tool for Engagement and Change

Strategic approaches to institutional inquiry and change frequently rely on problem-solving models such as SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats), an organizational assessment process incorporating analysis of internal strengths and weaknesses as well as external opportunities and threats.

In this particular approach, developed in the 1960's at the Stanford Research Institute, participants work together to generate, discuss and plan for future action using a framework investigating positive possibilities while simultaneously focusing on problems and the need for

defence. Although the SWOT method has been used extensively in a diverse range of organizations for decades, it produces results that are considered by some to be limiting.

The emphasis throughout the SWOT process, according to Richard Wilson and Colin Gilligan (2005), is often on quantifiable or "hard" elements rather than on relational and potentially essential factors such as attitudes, cultures, capabilities and competencies. The SWOT model, like many other organizational assessments, tends to produce concrete, mechanistic answers to questions embedded within human systems as well as results that are misaligned with the key relational components of the organization itself.

In contrast, Appreciative Inquiry (AI) offers both a methodology and philosophical approach to organizational growth, change and adaptability through its focus on relational capacity and experience (Whitney and Schau, 1998). Rather than dwelling on problems and group-generated solutions, appreciative inquiry embraces a radically affirmative approach to change and in doing so, can provide transformational results within organizations and among the individuals comprising them (White, 1996).

By "affirmative", White refers to the process, unique to appreciative inquiry, which elicits participant perceptions of organizational strengths, successes and peak experiences. As AI originator David Cooperrider has noted: Organizations tend to change in the direction in which they inquire. That is, by exploring and appreciating what is best about an organization, its members actively propel themselves collaboratively toward a future that embodies more of an enhanced state. Appreciative inquiry is the "…systemic discovery of what gives 'life' to a living system when it is most alive, most effective and most constructively capable in economic, ecological and human terms" (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999, p.3).

2.6 The Principles of Appreciative Inquiry

Five key principles underpin the appreciative inquiry process and provide further explanation on the distinct nature of the approach. The constructionist principle is the first and refers to the origins of AI being embedded in social construction theory, with its core premise being that reality is created through social interaction (Cooperrider et al, 2003).

In fact, Ken Gergen (1994) describes AI as taking the idea of social construction to the positive extreme with its emphasis on metaphor, narrative, relational ways of knowing, language and its potential as a source of generative theory. Organizations are made and imagined in conversation. As stories are increasingly shared within organizations, the more adept its members become at translating those stories into reality (Ludema, 2000). It is through the act of mutually creating and negotiating meaning through language that potentialities of the future are imagined and made real.

The second principle, positivity, is based on the premise that appreciative, affirmative approaches to inquiry lead to increased individual and collaborative motivation, inspiration and change. When peak experiences and strengths, rather than deficits, are emphasized, people have the opportunity to build on the best of what they have already accomplished.

The principle of simultaneity, the third, suggests that change evolves as the process of inquiry unfolds. This is in contrast to a typically linear model in which change is perceived to occur sequentially following steps such as assessment and intervention. During the discovery phase of AI, appreciative questions are posed to the participants and change processes emerge through generative dialogue. Essentially, the process is mutually affecting: the choice of

questions affects the language, the narratives and the ideas concerning potential futures offered in response.

The fourth is the poetic principle and likens an organization, or any human-based system, to a story - a form of creative narrative open to infinite interpretation and variation (Fitzgerald, Murrell, & Miller, 2003). AI supports this collaborative story-telling which aids in defining the present and future realities of an organization. It is in the multiplicity of these interpretations that potentiality resides. Organizational story-creation and interpretation are continually unfolding, reflecting the organic nature of its participants who both enact the story and articulate its themes.

Our shared concepts of the future greatly impact evolving realities. The anticipatory principle, the fifth, posits the idea that actions in the present are guided by organizational visions of the future. Envisioning (particularly in collaboration with others) an affirmative, bountiful future for an organization and its participants, energizes and focuses the form and quality of behaviour in the present. Truly, as Cooperrider (1990) posits, powerful actions in the present are successful to the degree that we are able to creatively draw upon our positive images of the future.

2.7 The Relationship of Appreciative Inquiry to this Study

I began to learn about appreciative inquiry during the process of discussing my project ideas with my advisor, Dr. Mary Gergen, and various colleagues. After reading several articles by Cooperrider, I was intrigued by the ideological framework AI provided, the positive focus of its approach and the possibility of having a co-constructive relationship with my interviewees in the generation of this project.

Originally this particular section of Chapter 2 was entitled “The Principles of AI Applied to this Study”, but this phrasing did not adequately describe the relationship between AI theory and the study itself. The research idea, the interview questions, and the written dissertation for this study have evolved in tandem with my own process of assimilating the philosophical premise of the approach - a process brought into being through ongoing social interaction with many others. Through a two-year period of defining and generating dialogue, the study itself has evolved, and it, in turn, documents the work of many others engaged in collaborative project work.

In summary, the study exemplifies the AI constructionist principle: It is a living, articulated exchange and development of oral ideas in the pre-research and research phases, and a documented discussion with the reader in written form regarding the constructed ideas and actions of interviewees involved in their own collaborative projects. Shared, co-created narratives between the participants at a multitude of levels are at the core of the project.

In addition to the constructionist principle, the other four AI principles are deeply imbedded within this study. The interview questions were designed with the positivity principle in mind, using language and sentence constructions framed to elicit affirming responses focused on organizational strengths. (For further rationale on the specific questions asked during the interview process, refer to the next section on study methodology.)

The principle of simultaneity, as demonstrated through this study, first became apparent through my conversations with my advisor and others related to the project, and later, as I engaged in the interviews with my participants. In particular, after the first series of interviews, I noted that participants commented on the affecting nature of the interview process; several mentioned that having the opportunity to reflect on provocative questions and articulate their

ideas orally on the projects they had been involved in, helped to clarify - and even shift - their understandings.

In response, I began to add a question at the end of each interview asking participants to comment on the interview process. This formalised the opportunity for interviewees to provide feedback; most responded similarly to those who had offered unsolicited responses. In addition, several expressed appreciation for a forum that encouraged them to contemplate and articulate their project experience. Others stated that the interview process created a sense of personal recommitment to the project and consolidated the project experience for them. Such a shift in perspective could undoubtedly alter future personal engagement with a project, making the interview process itself an agent of change.

The final two principles of AI, the poetic and anticipatory principles, are also evident in the study design and implementation. The text of the interviews completed with the study participants reveals individually expressed, but richly interwoven stories, each highlighting specific aspects of their respective projects. Multiple interpretations of core stories, as well as secondary narratives created through subsequent discourse, form a multidimensional set of perceived realities. As the anticipatory principle indicates, the actions taken by participants, in relation to their involvement in project-work, is directed by the quality and strength of the story-vision generated collaboratively.

2.8 Organizational Culture and Meaning Making

The term “culture” may refer to varying groups within a range of contexts. For the purpose of this discussion, several definitions applicable to organizational cultures are considered. Schein

(1993) describes organizational cultures to be based on shared assumptions within a group, developed through simultaneous adaptation to external conditions and internal integration of members.

Similarly, Morgan's understanding (1997) of cultures within organizations involves shared frames of reference that are continually created, communicated and sustained. Morgan perceives culture as an active, vibrant phenomena through which people jointly create and recreate the worlds in which they live. Both Schein and Morgan suggest that subcultures within larger, complex organizations must exist out of necessity, particularly when they are composed of specialized work groupings with diversity in background, purpose and origin. Hosking (2006) also notes that a particular organization does not necessarily have one organization-wide culture, rationality and leadership reality. Rather, it is natural for sub-groups within any organization to evolve based on the complex roles, responsibilities and tasks that emerge over time.

It is how these sub-groups are connected, and the means by which they communicate which determines the nature of their work together and the resulting potential for organizational transformation. How are effective organizational cultures created and sustained in order to maximize effectiveness and innovation? Chia and King (1998) state that the possibility of success is optimized when participants, and the sub-groups they form, are richly connected within a structure that supports non-linear, less formalized ways of communicating. This echoes Barrett's (1995) premise that, in order to be truly effective, modern organizations must dismantle traditional boundaries of hierarchy as well as functional divisions separating specialists.

In *Creating Appreciative Learning Cultures*, Barrett notes that high-performing organizations are able to coordinate diverse skills and multiple knowledge specialties, and integrate streams of technologies to create innovation - rather than rely on stereotyped roles and relationships.

Furthermore, successful organizations foster norms that support members' rights to question and provoke at all levels, and provide access to forums where decision making happens. Generative learning within the culture of the organization occurs through continuous experimentation and systemic - rather than fragmented - ways of thinking and forming working groups.

Communication between various cultures can be challenging, particularly if these groups derive from very different parts of an organization, or even extend across geographical boundaries. And, yet, the work we are increasingly engaged in, such as the three case studies this project focuses on, require that we work together across typical role boundaries closely and with creative productivity. Gergen, McNamee and Barrett (2001) propose that it is the people in our immediate social groups who contribute to our sense of ourselves, what is real and what is right; additionally, our continued engagement in these groups naturally accentuates our tendency to avoid those who are different. Accounts of others may grow increasingly simplified and develop into an 'extremity of perception' – rigid ideas regarding those outside of the immediate group. To prevent negative conceptions, and to work through such ideas which have already developed, the authors suggest it is necessary to define the 'common and solidifying realities' shared by the parties involved.

Promoting separate parties as being part of a larger, defined group with unified goals helps to bring together individuals who may otherwise have disparate, antagonistic agendas. Likewise, deliberately creating opportunities for members to fully express their ideas, and affirm the ideas of others contributes powerfully to group solidarity and minimizes the potential for conflict. Gergen and Gergen (2004) submit that language is used in accordance with the conventions of a cultural community, and that understanding and agreement unfold from the perspective of local conventions. Individuals construct reality in different ways, but within a shared cultural

tradition. By being willing to look beyond the immediate meaning suggested by one's own cultural perspective, and by listening and asking questions in new ways, it is possible to engage in ways that can be transforming.

Likewise, Sallyann Roth, a founder of The Public Conversations Project, an organization dedicated to bridging communication between groups with differing views on divisive public issues, has been highly active as a cross-cultural communications facilitator and is focused on ways to create transformational dialogue. In *Listening to Connect* (1999), she differentiates between two key phases of listening during a conversation: the first involves listening to learn and understand, while the second focuses on listening to develop solutions and develop actions.

Roth notes that fully understanding the needs and ideas of the other group does not necessitate agreement, but may open solutions that were previously unclear or non-existent. As part of the dialogue process, she condones listening for shared (super-ordinate) goal descriptions, assuming mutual capacity, and genuinely acknowledging what is important to the other party. By speaking fully and respectfully from a place of compassion, and by invoking a potentially shared 'big picture' which includes recognition of what has worked well in the past, it is possible to bring diverse cultural groups together in meaningful ways.

CHAPTER THREE - Research Methodology

3.1 The Purpose of This Chapter

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the process of developing the study; discuss the creation and implementation of the interview format and questions; elaborate on considerations regarding the case studies and interviewees; provide a summary of the conversations that took place during the interviews; and define the process of analysis applied to the emergent data. As it has been a key element in my own understanding of attitudes toward qualitative studies undertaken within college settings, a section describing the Selkirk College Research Ethics Board Committee approval process in relation to my project proposal has also been included.

3.2 The Development of the Study

When I recently re-read my application to the Taos Tilburg Program, submitted more than three years ago, I was surprised to find that my project is actually aligned quite closely with what I originally envisioned. In my application letter (Figure 3.0), dated January 2007, I described my work and possible research interests:

Figure 3.0 Application Letter to the Taos/Tilburg Program

Although the accelerated growth and development of the Selkirk College International Education Department have been largely very positive, they have also been accompanied by challenges, compounded by the reality of working within a

public, highly unionized organization. Challenges I regularly consider and attempt to address include:

1. How can a team best determine a joint vision for a task or project and work through the processes needed to reach completion in a way that is effective, creative and inspiring for all involved?"

2. Can disagreement within such a process be productive and energizing rather than destructive?

3. What is my role as a manager in helping to define and motivate growth opportunities for individuals I work with, particularly as shifts occur in required skill-sets?

4. How can I present change positively, even if it involves downsizing in some areas, as well as engage colleagues in working to adapt to such changes?

5. What means can be used to develop, facilitate and utilize the strengths and interests of all team members as well develop my own interests and actualization?

6. How can institutions better integrate the spiritual needs and development of learners and teachers?"

7. Within a traditional institutional structure, how can innovations in programming and delivery be presented and implemented?

8. How can the aesthetics of program and project creation be defined, developed and shared?

9. Is it possible to shift the structure of an institution in order to foster transformational change? (I'm referring specifically to a new program in International Digital Film for which I was primarily responsible. The program incorporated international faculty with global filmmaking expertise, alternate delivery modes and international project

opportunities - none of which fit easily into the processes and policies of the institution.)

10. As a cost-recovery unit, how can we continue to balance the economic realities of international education with our responsibility to provide excellent programming and experiences for students?

11. How do we jointly determine what our priorities are and how best to achieve them?

I envision my preparation for research focusing on strategic leadership and the relationship between individual and organizational transformational change. One possibility that interests me at this point is looking at strategies for organizational development and change from the multicultural perspective of three separate institutions: Selkirk College and two of our partners: Monterrey Technical University in Mexico, and Konan College in Japan.

Specifically, how do individuals within organizations in differing cultures perceive and affect change? How do they facilitate teamwork that effectively anticipates and implements developmental transformation? How do they gauge success?

3.3 Project Construction

In the early summer of 2007, I was introduced to new and returning Taos-Tilburg students during a conference organized by the program founders at the University of New Hampshire. My advisor, Dr. Mary Gergen, and I met together for the first time over lunch to discuss my project ideas and original proposal. I recall discussing the development and administration of the new

Selkirk College International Digital Film Program, which was by then just concluding its first academic year and which I had co-developed over a two-year period.

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the program was a joint venture between two departments, International Education and Digital Media, and was the first interdisciplinary program of its kind at Selkirk College. It was unique in terms of its curriculum content, delivery and student project opportunities. A Selkirk College press release distributed throughout the region prior to the start of the program highlighted the unique features and potential of the program. (See Figure 3.1)

Figure 3.1 Selkirk College Film Program in Demand

By Jane Hicks, Selkirk College Communications, 2007

Why are the creators of award-winning films like *Scared Sacred* and *The Friendship Village* so interested in Selkirk College? A new program tells the tale.

Selkirk's new International Digital Film Program, coming in September, is already generating excitement. The intensive two-semester advanced diploma program, designed with the assistance of leading industry figures, is appealing to people who have always dreamed to making their own films. The new IDF Program focuses on the growing trend toward smaller, independent and documentary filmmaking. Students study everything from writing a screenplay, to directing and shooting a film, through to the editing process. International content and delivery are central to the program, with global film and documentary studies making up a fair portion of the course. As part

of their final project, students also have the option of a study-abroad experience.

Cara Weston, International Education Department Head, says, "The IDF Program addresses the keen interest people in our community have in global issues, the arts and film in particular. Our goal is to provide people with the inspiration and tools they need to bring their own stories and ideas to the screen." According to Michelle Mason, New York Independent Film and Video Festival award-winner, "The International Digital Film Program is an exciting initiative at an important time. With the increasing corporate nature of our media, people are turning to independent documentaries more than ever in their search for perspective and insight. This program will help bring new voices and vision to a rich film legacy in this country - one that reflects the tolerance and insight of the Canadian experience at home and abroad."

Although the program achieved its fundamental goals and students were successful in making the transition to emerging filmmakers through the rigorous two semester post-graduate level program, I found my role as main administrator of the program challenging. At the core of this challenge were deep differences between the organizational cultures of the International Education Department and Digital Media. As Mary Gergen and I spoke about the distinctive differences between the two departments within the same organization and how these differences had been amplified through the operation of this new program - in levels of formality, approaches to program/course structure, delivery, scheduling, accountability, modes of student and staff communication, and expectations of student success - it became apparent that the International Digital Film Program, as one project within an institutional setting, had created a

network of questions and ideas that could form a threshold or base for the dissertation project as a whole.

Rather than focusing primarily on global institutional partners and their perceptions of organizational leadership and change, as originally proposed, I decided to include three case studies of projects - all with an international dimension in some capacity, originating from Selkirk College. Furthermore, the focus of the research would be inquiry into the kinds of questions provoked through my experience with the Film Program project. The three projects I chose, including the Mir Centre for Peace, Republic of Georgia Workforce Development Project, and Guatemala Nursing Project, all involved varied stakeholders from a range of subject areas and departments within Selkirk College, each with its own unique organizational culture, as well as external global partners.

In this way, it would be possible to consider cross-cultural challenges and bridging within one organization more deeply, as well as broader global implications. Each project was well-established, having been in process for at least two years, and included at least fifteen participants from a range of college areas, with varying levels of seniority and responsibility. In addition to College members, all of the projects also included regional and international partners. Although I had peripheral knowledge of the projects through my position as Department Head of International Education, I had not been directly involved the individual projects.

As indicated by the following project description submitted to the Research Ethics Committee (Figure 3.2) at Selkirk College later in 2007, the focus of my actual study was similar in some ways to my original program application but also included ideas generated from initial and subsequent conversations with Dr. Mary Gergen, as well as colleagues and friends:

Figure 3.2 Project Description

My research and dissertation, titled "Collaborative Project Development: Innovations, Practices and Outcomes" focuses on several project case studies undertaken within the post-secondary system in British Columbia. The essence of the project lies in two main areas of inquiry:

First, what motivates individuals working within post-secondary systems to envision, initiate and proceed with collaborative projects that are complex, innovative, and possibly exist initially outside of formalized strategic plans? How do these projects move from conception to implementation and how is this process affected by such factors as desire for social change, creative expression, individual and collective growth, educational development, collaborative opportunities and challenge?

Second, once engaged in these projects which often involve individuals from different areas or cultures within the same institution, what are the perceived challenges, benefits and outcomes that participants encounter? What are the strengths that participants bring as co-constructing partners and how do they define their peak experiences during project implementation? How are challenges best addressed prior to and during the project implementation phase and how can defined best practices be fostered?

My research includes a series of one-on-one interviews with faculty and administrators involved in several innovative, collaborative projects at Selkirk College, including the MIR Centre for Peace, Guatemala Student Nursing Project and Republic of Georgia

Workforce Development Initiative. Founders of the projects, as well as individuals who joined projects later in the process, participate in this study.

The context of each case study is described within the dissertation, as well as the roles, experiences, and perceptions of the individuals involved. The framework of the interview questions is based on an appreciative inquiry/social constructionist model, with an emphasis on open-ended, positive and collaborative dialogue. The appreciative inquiry model focuses on discovering and applying new knowledge and ideas about fundamental elements of organizational life, derived from inquiry into strengths, examples of competence, and perceptions of excellence.

3.4 Designing the Interview Format and Questions

I approached the opportunity to develop interview questions utilizing an appreciative inquiry framework with a great deal of intellectual curiosity and some trepidation. In retrospect, my hesitancy was due to the new challenge of negotiating a series of questions within an interview setting - a process diametrically opposed to the typical problem-solving mode predominant in institutional meetings and visioning sessions.

Over more than twenty years, I had attended an incalculable number of meetings comprised of defining a problem or issue, brainstorming possible causes and effects, generating multiple intervention ideas (predictably in small groups recording on flip chart paper) and reconvening with the whole group to share information, decide on an approach, and generate accountability measures.

Although my research partially involved inquiring into challenges encountered during complex projects, the greater focus would be on the participants' perceptions of what had worked, and how this knowledge could be supported and applied to other communal initiatives. With appreciative inquiry, the emphasis is on generative, discovery-based, co-constructive processes for creating change. In the following section (3.5), I discuss the each of the interview questions and the rationale for their development.

3.5 The Interview Questions: Rationale and Desired Outcomes

1. *Can you tell me about what you were doing prior to coming to the college? What is your current position? Have you been involved in a similar or related project in the past?*

As well as attempting to begin the interview with a relaxed and colloquial tone, I wanted to create a context and background for the individual's involvement in the current project. Threads of interest and participation from the past often provide insight into motivation into current activity in the present. (Interestingly, several participants remarked that they had forgotten that they had been involved in a related interest many years ago.) Comments on previous and current professional positions clarify potential roles and responsibilities regarding current projects.

2. *How did you become interested in this project idea? What was the initial "spark"? What was your vision? Who else was involved with this initial phase of the idea?*

Describing the inspiration and collaboration with others initially involved in the project provides information regarding the interviewees' perceptions of motivation, personal goals, creativity and potentiality. I also wanted to inquire into the sequential phases of project development and the environmental conditions that may have contributed to idea generation and eventual project implementation.

3. *What personal goals and values motivated you to move forward? What organizational goals affected your interest and involvement? Which of these factors were most important to you?*

Of fundamental interest in this study is the impact of organizational structure and goals on innovative project creation and implementation. How do individuals balance their individual interests within the umbrella goals of the organization? Do organizational goals and statements of vision drive individual conceptions of creation and change?

4. *Describe the key events marking the evolution of the project. Talk about a key event that was important and/or memorable to you and why it stands out.*

This question highlighted individual and group perceptions of project evolution, how these processes were described and why perceived "key" events were considered pivotal. Why were certain events during the life of the project considered memorable by individuals and/or the majority, and how was this related to group inclusivity and co-construction of project narrative?

5. *Talk about your concept of leadership and how it relates to this project.*

It was important to explore participants' ideas of leadership and hierarchy in relation to the projects. I was intrigued as to whether hierarchies similar to the College structure had been maintained within the projects, or whether flattened or alternative modes of collaborative work had been put in place. If alternative models were apparent, how were they developed and operationalized? What were the effects?

6. *Describe one or two outcomes of this project that you consider exceptional successes. Who was involved? Why do you consider these experiences exceptional? How did these successes come about?*

Focusing on what participants consider to be "exceptional successes" isolates peak experiences, highlights factors related to occurrence, and is potentially motivating for participants to discuss. Is there group consensus on which outcomes were considered exceptional? How was this consensus reached?

7. *Were there project results that were different than what you expected?*

This question provided the opportunity for participants to not only describe unexpected results, but those which may have been undesirable or challenging. Although framed neutrally, the question allowed participants to respond with ideas about potential obstacles encountered, and ideas about working with them. Conversely, what results were unexpected and positive? This brings forward potential understandings of creativity, flow and the collaborative process.

8. *Would you consider this project to be aligned with the duties defined in your role at the College? With the institutional mission and vision statements? In what ways was the project innovative and/or "outside the box"?*

This question further develops the concepts indicated in question 3. Are individuals driven to build collaborative projects within organizations out of personal interest, professional goals, organizational demand, or a combination of these factors? How are innovative projects brought into the framework of an organizational setting, particularly if they are initially considered a "risk" or on the "fringes"?

9. *Discuss the resources and support you experienced during the project. What ideas do you have about what could have further supported your efforts and those of the team?*

This open question looks further at perceptions of what elements were critical to project success.

10. *Did the project involve working with individuals from different groups or cultures, within the same organization or between different organizations? What challenges arose from these possible differences? Describe one example of how you and others were at your best while working together. In retrospect, what changes in collaborative work could have further assisted the project?*

These questions provide an opportunity to discuss effective strategies utilized during collaborative processes involving cross-cultural groups within the single organization.

11. *Discuss the global context of your project. How did you facilitate work with overseas partners and stakeholders?*

This question broadens the ideas generated in question 10 to consider communication with external stakeholders in a global context.

12. *What do you value most about the work you and others did on this project together?*

Further building on questions 4 and 6, this question provides interviewees with the opportunity to express more personal conceptions of "valued work".

13. *Describe what you envision as your ideal project work environment. What ideas do you have about action that could be taken to help create such an environment?*

I was intrigued by how interviewees would define "environment" in relation to their projects. What environmental elements would they consider pivotal?

14. *I'm interested in your response to the process of being interviewed for this study. Have these questions affected you in any way, or caused you to reflect on your project differently?*

This question was added following completion of the first few interviews, after it became apparent to me that the process of participating in the interviews was affecting for interviewees--and that together, the participants and I were co-constructing their understanding of their project experiences.

3.6 Interviews, Conversations and Story-Telling

> *The gesture of turning to another, of inventing a movement with another whom I do not know and cannot anticipate, is a gesture attentive to a resounding silence, in which I am exposed as a body in motion. In the case of tango, my language is what I reveal to you in the intimacy of the embrace, a language that introduces you to a movement that invites you to respond to a direction we initiate together.*
>
> - Erin Manning, Dancer/Philosopher/Professor, *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty*

There is unquestionably a "dance" that occurs through the process of conversational meaning-making, particularly when interviewee and interviewer are not familiar with each other, as described poetically in Manning's quote above. The dialogue between myself and the project participants and the resulting unfolding narrative; the mutual negotiation of meaning through inquiry, response and clarification; my willingness to listen openly and hold the "potentiality" of the conversation; the participants' frank and personal expressiveness - all served to build individual stories with important common themes. In fact, with my participation in the

interviews, I became not just an external researcher posing questions but rather, an extended member of the community engaged in the actual project-making.

This sense of belonging is a natural result of fully participating in the sharing of narrative, whether as the teller, listener or both. Whitney and Cooperrider (2000) note how storytelling serves to express, explore and adapt values. This process is highly personal, and leads to the environment gaining a sense of being invitational and inclusive. It is also affecting, as stories contain "seeds of wisdom grounded in experience". Certainly, this combination of value-sharing, inclusiveness and experiential wisdom were evident in the interviews I participated in, and contributed to the powerful quality of the exchanges.

Many of the project participants had not had the opportunity prior to the interviews to articulate their ideas individually or jointly on the project process, at least not in the areas my questions focused on. Several participants became openly emotional during the interviews, particularly when expressing ideas on personal values, experiences and motivation, and others were appreciative of the opportunity to clarify and express their ideas and understandings. This sense of appreciation was evident in one participant's comments at the end of the interview: "I'm enjoying the opportunity through this interview to reflect on why I do things and how I ended up here. It's made me stop and think about why I'm doing it…it reinforces the initial commitment and re-energizes." Another participant remarked, "Some of these questions are deep. I don't normally have the opportunity to think about these things."

The dialogic processes that the participants and I engaged in during the interviews could be considered co-creative, in that were engaging, generated further understandings of self and other in relation to what had occurred, and helped to sustain interest in continued and future project involvement. In the best sense, our conversations could be considered potential catalysts for

development and change. Barbara Myerhoff (1980) describes a story told aloud as being more than just a text; rather, it is an event. Furthermore, it is through this event, the process of storytelling, that the listener becomes more than a passive receiver or validator, and is potentially changed. The act of meaningful sharing, of seeing the other deeply and of being seen – is generally a rare occurrence in our daily lives, and can be profoundly affecting when it is experienced.

The interchange of rich, personal narrative provides an opportunity for such a transformational catalyst, both individually and organizationally. If organizations are made and imagined in conversation, and move in the directions of focus, it is because individuals within the system are actively engaged in the experience of storytelling on multiple levels. As Ludema (2000) suggests, the more we share stories, the more adept we become at translating these stories into reality, irregardless of the range of the context we find ourselves in.

3.7 An Overview of the Projects

3.7.1 The Mir Centre for Peace

As Myler Wilkinson describes in *Mir Centre for Peace at Selkirk College - Understanding and Building Cultures of Peace - A Brief Narrative History* (2006), the land on which Selkirk College is located is "…founded in history and amidst the unique natural beauty of the West Kootenay region" (p.1). First occupied by Aboriginal peoples and then settled in part by Doukhobours, who were pacifist Christians exiled from Russia, Ukraine and Georgia, the land has a rich and complex cultural history. It also incorporates a richness of additional cultural

groups, most notably from other parts of Europe, the United States and Asia, and is known as a region with highly active political, environmental and artistic traditions.

Since 1966, when Selkirk College was initially established, the institution has shared the large peninsula formed by the joining of the Kootenay and Columbia Rivers with several remaining historic buildings from a traditional Doukhobour commune formed about a century ago. In 1999, members of the Selkirk and broader community held initial meetings to discuss the idea of renovating one of the decaying Doukhobour homes to create the Mir Centre for Peace.

Mir Peace Centre Founders Linda and Myler Wilkinson

Background: Doukhobour Home Being Restored as MIR Centre for Peace

It was decided over time that the centre would become a focal point for a range of college, community and global activities, integrating educational programming, special events and meetings. It is important to note that the word “mir” translated from ancient Russian is an appropriate choice for the centre, given its integrated meaning of peace, community and the world. Through a series of conversations the original Mir committee members generated a vision

for what the Mir Centre would become, as well as general philosophical guidelines it would embody (Wilkinson, 2006, p.4):

1. The fostering of non-violent interaction at all levels.

2. The acceptance of cultural, socio-economic, and gender inclusion across communities.

3. The recognition of heritage and historical values connected with local community and specific cultures of peace.

4. The recognition of the crucial importance of peace keeping and peace making at local, national and international levels.

5. The fostering of student awareness and character through courses, programs and research which contribute to an understanding of peace and an awareness of the mechanisms which lead to peaceful societies.

6. The recognition that peace and violence issues and potential solutions may include all of the following dimensions - the individual, the family, the community, civil society, government, and NGOs.

7. The awareness that global environmental and ecological issues are linked to human rights, social justice, and ultimately, peace.

8. The understanding that any study of peace and human rights must also include an awareness of their dark opposites: war, violence, and oppression.

9. The recognition that the United Nations designation of the year 2000 as Year for the Creation of the Culture of Peace presupposes a global human commitment to active preparation for peace, rather than a passive acceptance of the inevitability of war and aggression.

10. The final recognition that all of the above values and commitments must be subjected to the highest standards of intellectual, ethical, and practical endeavour on the part of all those connected with the Mir Centre.

These principles were operationalized through a sustained period of project development from 2000 - 2007. Through provincial and federal funding, as well as business and private donor sources, Mir Steering Committee members and many others worked collaboratively to physically renovate the original Doukobour building. The exterior brick walls were repaired, and the interior spaces redesigned to function as classrooms and meeting spaces. Other outdoor structures, including a traditional aboriginal smokehouse and arbour with firepit, were created. Separate task forces simultaneously developed a provincially articulated program in Peace Studies, organized an annual public lecture series, and offered a symposium on peace in cooperation with various community organizations.

The Mir Centre Opening Ceremony

Mir is an extensive project which continues to evolve, uniting the complex visions of diverse groups in the Kootenay community, Canada and beyond. Since 2007, annual awards have been set up through the Mir Centre and Selkirk College for students and groups demonstrating efforts advancing human rights and peace initiatives. The weekly "Peace Café", held in the Mir Building, offers a community forum for those interested in exploring local solutions to global issues through open dialogue.

The university programs in Peace Studies now include an associate of arts degree focused on peace and the environment, and a liberal arts diploma based on peace studies within a cultural and international context. Renowned global leaders involved in peace, environmental, political and economic initiatives are regularly scheduled to speak to the college and outer community at large on wide-ranging topics of international interest. The Mir Centre for Peace "…has become a signal landmark in the community imagination, a space held open for the relationships which may exist between community, landscape and history" (Wilkinson, 2006, p.13). It embodies the Centre's mission statement which is "…to understand and build cultures of peace through learning".

3.7.2 The Guatemalan Student Nursing Project

For three years, students enrolled in the Selkirk College Nursing Degree Program have had the opportunity to experience a specialized course in international nursing practice including a study abroad component in Guatemala. The purpose of the month-long excursion is to provide

students with meaningful exposure to core curriculum concepts of community development, health promotion and prevention within a global context.

Nursing Project Founder Mary Ann Morris (Left) with Patient

Through collaboration with Guatemalan community partners, government and non-government agencies, student nurses increase their understandings of primary health care in relation to social forces such as gender, socioeconomic status, working status, environment and human rights. Cooperation with groups such as AMES (Association of Women in Solidarity) and the May-Mam Health Promoters provides an essential link for the program organizers, in terms of implementing activities that are relevant and affecting. As part of their preparation for departure, nursing students engage in focused orientation activities such as learning about the social and political background of Guatemala, considering the impacts of global conditions and policy on the country, and exploring the relationship between health care and larger economic, social and political forces.

Once in Guatemala, the students meet with local community nurses and civic committees, tour a refugee camp, provide information on health promotion to several communities, experience healthcare visits to rural areas, visit elementary schools, speak with representatives at the Canadian Embassy in Guatemala, and are involved in many other activities. Through these types of direct experiences, the students become more aware of the daily realities of the poor and marginalized, such as the indigenous people of Guatemala, and witness the positive impact of targeted collaborative action. Their acquired understandings can then be applied to nursing roles in many contexts in Canada and beyond.

The Guatemalan opportunity is provided through a massive student fundraising effort in the college region which has been increasingly supported by community members. Students host a series of "Beans and Rice Dinners," make Christmas wreaths, sell calendars and attend local events to increase awareness of the project and seek funds. Several college and provincial international study abroad funding sources have been accessed through application, with the remaining trip costs paid for by individual students. As part of the project, Guatemalan project partners are provided with an honorarium for their participation.

Returning students, who then enter fourth year, are highly involved in preparations for the next group of nursing students participating in the project. They provide presentations to third year students, participate in orientation sessions and help to inform the community about the experience.

Selkirk nursing instructor Judith Fearing, in her letter of support for the program (2009) states that the partnerships formed by the project "…create opportunities for a more sophisticated and deeper dialogue and learning than is typically possible. Each year, the new students benefit from the deepening connections made in both the communities in Guatemala and here, by the

previous year's students. Because of these connections, it becomes truly possible to begin to understand global health and how our decisions and choices influence and impact each other. This deeper understanding then impacts on the student's nursing practice locally."

Selkirk College Nursing Students and Faculty with Guatemalan Project Participants

3.7.3 The Republic of Georgia Workforce Development Initiative

With historical connections to the Republic of Georgia through Doukhobour immigration to the Castlegar region more than a century ago, the Georgia Workforce Development Project is well aligned with the interests and goals of Selkirk College. The extensive project, originally

developed through a proposal grant program offered by the Association of Canadian Community Colleges, has received funding over several years from the Canadian International Development Agency.

In addition to Selkirk College, project partners include the Georgian Ministry of Education and Science, Georgian Technical University, Thompson Rivers University and a group of American colleges associated with Community Colleges for International Education. The project, which began in 2005 with several initial missions to Georgia by Selkirk College staff, addresses the need in the Georgia for sustainable economic recovery and development through workforce retraining and professional education. Using Canadian and American college education systems as models, 12 new professional learning centers with an emphasis on career, technical, trades and short-term training, are being created in rural Georgia.

The project executive summary, written by business consultant and participant Giuseppe Liberatore, (2008) states that the project goals include:

1. Two cohorts of Georgian Technical University trainers becoming skilled in new instructional approaches, one in face-to-face and the other in online, for development and delivery of curriculum for professional education. Through this developed capacity, faculty teaching in the professional learning centers will be trained in the new methodology, helping to ensure a quality learning experience for the students engaging in this hands-on, skill-based learning.
2. Small/Medium Enterprise training is an identified priority need in the rural communities. Training will be developed and piloted in one rural community. The curriculum will subsequently become part of the professional learning center programming, and used across Georgia.

3. Two diploma programs will be developed and piloted through the professional learning centers, with a continuing education component accompanying each.

4. Student governance will also be advanced through this project as student council members meet and work together.

Violet Kalesnikoff, a key founding member of the Georgia initiative, submitted the following document as part of the funding application to the Association of Canadian Community Colleges. In it, she provides social, historical and political context, defines the project rationale, and clarifies the relationship between this particular region in Georgia and the Selkirk College community. (See Figure 3.3)

Figure 3.3 Georgia Project Relevance

The Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Program (EDPRP) released in June 2003 set as its goal the improvement of Georgians' quality of life through sustainable development. It focuses on growth to create employment and generate fiscal revenues for sustained poverty reduction. Priorities include increased human capital through improved quality and delivery of education policies and services (*Country Development Programming Framework Georgia, CIDA website)*.

The population of the Republic of Georgia is approximately 5 million people; in the fall of 2005 there were over 200 degree-granting universities in the country. The Ministry of Education and Science's (MES) top priority, as mandated by the government, is to complete an accreditation process with the universities, reducing the number to under one hundred, and to develop 12 colleges (referred to as Professional Education Centres (PLCs)) in Georgia's rural areas. The first of these, to be located in Gori, approximately one and a half hours from Tbilisi, is

scheduled to begin delivering programs by September 2007. All PLCs are to be operational within five years.

These PLCs will be modeled after the American and Canadian college system, offering practical, short term, hands on learning to meet workforce needs. An infrastructure for delivering distance education courses across rural Georgia will be developed as part of the PLC system. The premise is that sustainable and more equitable economic development should come as employers gain access to graduates from the colleges and as individuals have the opportunity to engage in short term training in areas such as small/medium enterprise development and management.

Archil Samadashvili, the Head of Policy and Strategy Department at the Ministry of Education and Science shared the following with the mission team during the visit to Georgia: "We are in a unique, difficult situation; a change from socialism to free market. We were traditionally all employees, now we must be businessmen and entrepreneurs." He went on to say that there is high unemployment/underemployment, particularly in the rural areas, and yet there is a shortage of trained workers. Shortages are primarily in technical and trade areas, areas that require short term, focused training and specific skills. As well, product exists, but access to the knowledge of marketing, economics, and business that is essential to the development of Small/Medium Enterprises (SMEs) needs to be made available to prospective entrepreneurs. Interviews and meetings with various stakeholders confirmed Mr. Samadashvili's statements.

Unemployment is particularly rampant in the rural communities, as factories remain closed. Some of the youth are university educated, but because they lack the technical/practical skills to secure the few jobs that are available or to create their own jobs, they either remain living at home, in the ranks of the unemployed, or leave the rural community, migrating either to the urban areas or to other countries (and illegal migration to Russia is a serious concern). Other

youth lack the financial capability to move to the city to complete a post-secondary education, and also end up in the same situation. This out-migration is eroding the rural population, and creating an unbalanced age demographic in the communities. If not stemmed, it could spell the demise of the rural communities.

The rural economy, such as it is now, is agriculturally based. Honey, cheese, milk, potatoes, medical grasses, sunflower seed oil are all potential marketable products, but there is a lack of knowledge how to brand, market and sell these products in the national/global market. Multi-generational families frequently live together, existing on under $100 U.S. per month and barter. The potential for poverty reduction is there, the knowledge is not. Hence the relevance of this project to the DCO.

It has long been recognized that education is a cornerstone of sustainable economic development. The Ministry's goal to revitalize the economy, thereby reducing poverty, through education and training is in direct alignment with the MDGs and CIDA's mandate. A relevantly, well-trained workforce supports a revitalized economy which in turn reduces poverty. Providing potential entrepreneurs with the skills to succeed in their own business likewise contributes to sustainable economic growth and creates new opportunities for the skilled workforce. The development of relevant professional/career educational opportunities in rural areas where few or none currently exist is a long term, sustainable strategy to address poverty reduction.

CIDA has indicated in the Country Development Programming Framework (CDPF) document for Georgia that it would support initiatives that advance constructive relationship between the central government and minority/disadvantaged regions, that empower the poor, and that provide economic opportunities by increasing access to markets. The creation of rural Professional Learning Centres is a giant step in this direction, and the opportunity for Canadian

colleges to be a participant in the change and growth is a privilege.

Selkirk College is an integral part of its rural community, supporting economic development through education, training, and retraining. Just recently the entire region rallied around Selkirk College's bid to raise over one million dollars in matching funds to create a Regional Innovation Chair on Community Economic Development. This project is an opportunity for us to share our knowledge and expertise with the global community. Many of our region's citizens came to Canada from Georgia over 100 years ago. Many still maintain ties with the Doukhobour population remaining in the rural villages of Georgia, and are aware of the difficult condition under which they are currently surviving. They have already expressed how pleased they are to have their local college recognize their heritage and build ties with educational institutions there.

At this point, the project is ahead of schedule, with two of the learning centers having been completed and additional diploma programs being considered. Project participants from all of the partner institutions have actively been involved in missions abroad to share best practices, develop curriculum and training models, and meet community partners. Further possibilities under discussion include field trips and exchanges between Canadian and Georgian business leaders, students and faculty members. The importance of such exchanges is emphasized in Liberatore's Georgia summary report (2008) in that they "…help develop ties between the two nations, and possibly lead to expanded cooperation in the areas of trade, best business practices, culture and education."

Georgia Project - Gori Training Centre

Project Participants & Co-founder Violet Kalesnikoff (Third from Right)

3.8 Selection of the Interviewees and Interview Procedures

In total, twenty individuals directly involved in the Mir Centre for Peace, Guatemala Student Nursing Project and Georgia Workforce Development Initiative were interviewed for this project. They represented a multitude of College departments and positions, and had participated in the projects for varying time periods; several had initiated the projects and participated over a number of years, while others had joined for specific purposes over short time periods. Community members, students, and several individuals from partner institutions were also

included. Interestingly, several individuals I spoke with were active in more than one of the projects.

In order to determine the interviewees, I contacted several founding project participants to discuss my research interests and to request that they provide me with a list of people involved in their projects, both long-term participants and those who had joined more recently. I then sent out individual email letters explaining my study, a formal consent form approved by the Selkirk College Research Ethics Board (Figure 3.4), and the list of interview questions detailed in section 3.3 of this chapter. The majority of participants I contacted responded positively to my request, and in April 2008, I began to conduct the interviews. It is interesting to note that all participants chose to identify themselves in the written dissertation by their actual names, rather than taking the option provided in the consent form of using a pseudonym.

Figure 3.4 Participant Consent Form

Project Title: Collaborative Project Development: Innovations, Challenges and Outcomes
Researcher: Cara Weston

This consent form, a copy of which is given to participants, is only part of the process of informed consent. It provides participants the basic idea of what the procedure is about, and what their participation will involve. If participants would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, they should feel free to ask. As well as this consent form, participants receive a summary of the research project, including the background, rationale, objectives and the questions to be asked. This research project, titled "Collaborative Project Development: Innovations,

Challenges and Outcomes", is being implemented by Cara Weston, a student in the Tilburg University/Taos Institute PhD Program in Social Sciences. This study, and the resulting dissertation, is being undertaken to meet the requirements of the PhD Program in Social Sciences at Tilburg University, in conjunction with the Taos Institute. The researcher's supervisor on this project is Dr. Mary Gergen, based at Penn State University. She can be reached at gv4@psu.edu. The project involves case studies of collaborative projects, using taped interviews with individuals directly involved in the creation and development of such projects. Interviews will be approximately 90 minutes in length, and more than one interview may be required with each participant. Participants have the option of remaining anonymous, or including their name in the written dissertation. Note that, even if participants choose to use a pseudonym, anonymity is not guaranteed due to the highly contextualized nature of the study.

Participants have the right to refuse any question during the interview process, to go off the record, or to request that the tape recorder be turned off at any time. Participants will be provided with a copy of their taped interview(s) upon request. The tapes will be kept secure by the researcher, and after a two-year period, will be destroyed. No other persons will have access to the taped interviews. Specific information regarding the projects, roles and experiences of the participants will be included in the final research dissertation. Once the dissertation is complete, and approved by Tilburg University as meeting the requirements of the Ph.D., it will become a public document. From that time, it is possible that it may be used as a source document in subsequent academic research, publications or presentations.

All participants will be provided with a copy of the draft section pertaining to their responses. At that time, participants have the opportunity to provide feedback and respond to the content. Participants who would like to offer supplemental material relevant to their projects, in addition to the interviews, have the option of doing so. If participants supply the researcher with additional material, they will include a signed note consenting to the use of the material in the dissertation.

"I realize that there are no direct benefits to myself from this procedure. Further, should I decide that I no longer wish to participate in this study I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without any type of penalty whatsoever. My signature on this form indicates that I have understood the information regarding my participation in this project and that I agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive my legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. If I have any further questions concerning matters related to this research, I can contact Cara Weston."

VOLUNTEER			
Name:		Signature:	
Age:		Date:	
Anonymity: (Circle one) I choose to <u>disclose/not disclose</u> my name in the written dissertation. (Note that if you prefer to remain anonymous, a pseudonym of your choice will be used.)			

Interviews were one to two hours in length, conducted individually in my office or that of the interviewee's, and taped using a recorder; during the conversations, I made simultaneous word-processed transcripts on my computer. That is, I typed the responses provided by participants during the interviews. The accuracy of my typed transcripts was later checked against the recorded tapes, and participants were later provided with a copy of their individual transcripts to read and edit as they wished.

In retrospect, the majority of the interviewees seemed quite comfortable with the simultaneous transcription, as it prevented the interviews from being glaringly "one on one". That is, focusing my attention alternately on the individual and my computer seemed conducive to a fairly relaxed pace and tone, providing interviewees with more time and space to consider their responses. The questions provided to participants prior to the interviews were used to provide a framework during the conversations, but were adapted during the discussions according to the interests of the participants and the creative direction of their responses.

3.9 Qualitative Studies - Considerations within Traditional Academic Settings

> *The earth is not flat and neither is reality. Reality is continuous, simultaneous, complex, abundant and partly invisible.*
>
> - Jeanette Winterson, Author, *Art Objects*

My primary interest in using one-on-one interviews as the mode of research for this project was that I was keen to explore the subjective aspects of each interviewee's project-making experience. I was interested in individual responses to fairly personal questions concerning

motivation, values, perceptions and future dreams. In short, I hoped to share existing and new threads of dialogue and story-creation and discuss the effects of this process with my participants. The reality, however, was that this goal did not resonate well with the Research Ethics Board when I initially approached the committee for project approval.

There is no doubt that fundamental differences exist between qualitative and quantitative approaches to research, particularly in relation to perspectives of objectivity/subjectivity, modes of study, interpretation and validity of outcomes, as well as researcher/subject relationships. Quantitative research utilizes highly structured methods of data collection, closed-ended question formats, numerical results, and attempts to quantify variation and predict statistical causality. In contrast, qualitative studies offer greater flexibility: questions are more open-ended and interactive according to participant response; semi-structured methods such as in-depth interviews are utilized to seek a richness of description and explanation based on individual experience; and resulting data is textual versus numerical.

The richness of detail and depth of information qualitative research offers is, in part, due to the potential of a less hierarchical relationship between researcher and participant. Rather than interacting as experts dependent on a rigid set of guidelines and a defined set of responses, qualitative researchers typically offer a more equal presence to the interview dialogue, and seek to inquire, negotiate and construct meaning with interviewees as partners (Gergen, M., 2009). Traditional approaches to research with participants involve more of a "subject - object" relationship, likened to Hosking's conceptions of leadership in which one individual is actively influencing and affecting the easily led "other" (Hosking, 2006).

Within the traditional research community, qualitative studies have been criticized as lacking validity and rigor, being subjective in their approach, and producing results that are not easily

generalized to larger populations. Such concerns were brought forward by the Selkirk College Research Ethics Board in response to my proposal submitted for this project. At that time, the Board was in the process of initially developing and refining its own guidelines, and had received mainly quantitative research proposals not involving human subjects. In addition, the Committee was formed mainly of individuals with backgrounds in what are often referred to as "hard science" subject areas, including chemistry, biology and math. My proposal was one of the first of its genre that the committee had vetted.

It may be common for research ethics boards to be more comfortable with positivist studies aiming to produce measurable, verifiable knowledge through traditional modes of observation, induction, hypotheses and testing. Physicist John Wheeler (1998) discusses a "participative universe" in which the act of looking for certain information evokes the very information that is being sought. This concept can be applied to traditional research measurement which, in its quest to be highly defined and quantifiable, tends to lose more information than is gained by limiting the possibility of other potentials. Guba and Lincoln (1994) define this perspective as an "ontology of naive realism": an assumption that reality is "out there" and can be produced objectively by the "knower". An evolution of this, according to the same authors, is evident in post-positivism, which exhibits critical, rather than naive assumptions regarding findings and views objectivity as being "imperfectly achieved".

Similarly, Lorraine Code (1991) addresses the epistemological model underpinning most scientific understanding and concludes that it relies on a perception of knowledge as being a "separate entity", which is both abstract and disembodied from the knower. Furthermore, this view is reflective of a prevalently "male gaze" according to researchers such as Harding (1986)

and Sampson (1993) - a reality which has traditionally determined both the problems to be studied in academia as well as the methodology.

This dominance of the traditionalist approach is reflected in the style and voice considered acceptable for academic research and writing. Typically, the genre demands a formalized, objective and impersonal tone; that is, overt subjectivity is considered to "dilute" the power of argument. Undoubtedly, a dissertation project such as my own, which includes qualitative interviews focused on individual perspectives of experience, is less traditional in form and content. However, as the author, I am aware that it must still conform to the more conventional expectations of the larger institution within which the degree resides. My perception is that the partnering of the Taos organization with Tilburg University allows for increased flexibility in structure, content and tone - to a certain degree. In effect, innovation in these areas must "bridge" effectively into tradition, a challenge I find particularly interesting given my academic background in sociolinguistics.

For example, I initially began this section (3.9) on qualitative research considerations, not with the Jeanette Winterson quote, but with the following:

> *Ultimately, I have found it meaningless to hold the yardstick of fact against the complexities of the human heart. Reality simply isn't large enough to hold us.*
>
> - A. Manette Ansay, Author, *River Angel*

Later, when editing the section, and after some deliberation, I removed Ansay's words as the introductory quote. Although the author seems to effectively describe the tension inherent in attempting to quantify and define human experience within the constraints of objective modes,

and therefore would seem to fit well as an introduction to this section - the phrasing also has a poetic, personal quality and relates experience not just to the individual, but to the "complexities of the human heart". I considered the possibility that the word choices and overall tone of the quote could be potentially deemed inappropriate and overly subjective by readers and members of my dissertation committee in relation to other research discussed in the section, my study and the academic program within which it resides. And, ultimately, my own academic censors, based on years of previous experience teaching formal academic writing, caused me to question its inclusion.

At the same time, the quote poignantly and clearly expresses how challenging it can be to distill the personal motivations and experiences of self and other into traditional forms that are more commonly understood. Sampson (1993) notes, "...having a voice is not sufficient if that voice must speak in a register that is alien to its own specificity, and in so doing lose its own desire and interests." Since the quote has potential value in its emotional affect - that is, Ansay's writing may clarify the point in its very contrast to the typical academic register – it is included here. I am aware of its connotations, but offer it as an example of a subjective counterpart within an academic register.

3.10 Negotiation with the Research Ethics Board

Due to my study being conducted within the somewhat insular environment of Selkirk College, Research Ethics Board (REB) members questioned whether participants would be vulnerable due their inability to be completely anonymous, even with a pseudonym. The Committee felt that the lack of anonymity could place some participants at "serious risk" due to

the potential nature/content of their responses, and make other participants less than forthcoming with comments that they felt would place them at risk, thus reducing the effectiveness and validity of the research. REB members also questioned the effect of my position as Selkirk International Department Head, citing the potential pressure individuals might feel to participate in response to my request.

Over a three-month period, I worked with the committee to adapt my original proposal, consent form and research approach in response to members' concerns. It was a fairly collaborative process, as the REB also used my proposal to increase its understanding of qualitative studies involving human subjects, and further developed and formalized its own approval procedures. At one point in the process, my advisor Dr. Mary Gergen wrote a letter in support of the project on my behalf to the ethics board; her effort, in addition to the various updates to the committee I provided, served to further clarify the project and reassure the members. In her letter (Figure 3.5), Dr. Gergen describes the rationale for the project and its potential benefits:

Figure 3.5 Letter to Selkirk College Research Committee

January 29, 2008

To: Selkirk College Research Committee

From: Dr. Mary Gergen, Penn State University

I am writing about the Ph.D Dissertation proposal that Cara Weston has given to your committee. Cara has sent me recent correspondence regarding the proposal and has asked that I inform you of my views on the research proposal and how it might go

forward. The gist of the study is related to how various groups of people are able to work together to produce an outcome, such as the Mir Peace Center at the college. The approach she is taking is an appreciative one; it looks at the positive possibilities of creating a project, how groups may align, and what resources are necessary in order for a project to succeed. Her perspective is one that is seeking positive outcomes, and ways of reaching them; it is not a critical perspective, where she might be looking for individuals to blame or organizational failures if projects are not at the peak of perfection.

In our globalized world, as it is now shaping up, the frequency of inter-cultural groups meeting and working together on joint projects is ever increasing. This PhD program is an example, and it is interesting that Cara's project echoes issues within our organization, with the sponsoring university in The Netherlands, her advisor in Pennsylvania, her committee in several possible locations, and Cara in Canada. I believe that Cara's work is very important in terms of its overall theme. In order to find ways in which groups from different backgrounds can collaborate, this type of research must be done.

The type of qualitative research involved in this dissertation is deeply relational in its character. This makes it somewhat different from empirical research done in many natural science laboratories. The research is not organized to discover basic "laws" or conditions or causes of one independent variable in relation to a dependent variable. Within our epistemological purview, we acknowledge that under different

circumstances with different interviewers, different spaces, times, or different weather conditions, etc., the nature of the interview could change. At the same time, the author must acknowledge that these constraints are present, and consider the impact they might have on the interviews. One of the reasons that Cara wants to invite many voices to comment on various activities is to compare the various perspectives on how a project did or did not go well. She expects that there will not be total agreement or harmonious interpretations. She will make no effort to disguise this issue, despite the manner in which this complicates the outcomes.

What we, in the Ph.D. program, most want is for Cara to engage deeply in a project, engage in intellectual activities, be ethical in her relations with her participants, be open to diversity in the interviews, and write a dissertation that will be helpful in generating new ideas in the field of organizational development and change. We would also hope that upon completion of her degree, Cara will use her skills and knowledge, garnered through this research project, to enhance others' understandings of the field through publications and ongoing teaching, collaborative project development, and consulting.

As mentioned, my proposal was approved by the REB following an (unexpected) three-month process of communication and clarification between the committee members and myself regarding various aspects of the project. As individuals outside of my own department and areas of responsibility were to be interviewed, the REB gradually became less concerned with the impact of my position as Department Head. Adjustments were made to several documents at the

request of the committee: For example, the informed consent form participants were provided with prior to the interviews was extended with greater detail, and respondents were given the choice of using their names or pseudonyms. A final reassurance was the nature of the questions themselves: committee members were given sample questions, as well as a written description of the appreciative inquiry approach in relation to in-depth interviews. When it was apparent that the inquiry would be positive and strengths-based, rather than a potentially critical survey of the projects and institution, the committee members seemed more comfortable with the project.

When I reflect now on the experiences involved in having the project approved by the Selkirk College Research Ethics Board, it seems understandable that there were considerable challenges during this part of the process. Not only was the project topic and methodology different from most prior research done at the College, but the committee members themselves had engaged mainly in more traditional academic work. At the time, the majority of members represented the hard sciences. Working together through the approval process - as frustrating as it was at times - enabled the committee to tighten and clarify its own approval process for future researchers at the College, and resulted in my own application becoming more succinct. In fact, despite the delay it caused to my project, the experience serves as an example of collaborative construction resulting in a positive end product for all involved.

3.11 Interview Data and the Process of Constructing Meaning

When determining an approach to interpret the interview data generated from this study, I assumed a mutual responsiveness between the researcher (myself) and the participants, within the context of the study. This approach seemed well suited to a project imbedded within a social

constructionist framework. Unlike traditional research, which tests a hypothesis and follows a fairly rigid linear path, I was interested in the concept of a co-created study evolving as conversations and meaningful connections unfolded. An understanding of the data naturally emerged through the process of constructing, conducting and comparing information across interviews.

It was a mulit-faceted process, overlapping rather than strictly sequential, composed of data collection, note-taking, coding, sorting and writing. Detailed note-taking, rather than transcribing tapes word-for-word following interviews, allowed me to capture key ideas and themes while maintaining efficiency. (As mentioned earlier, I also taped my interviews for the purpose of checking the notes later for accuracy and to add any missing key ideas.)

Coding occurred as I re-read the interview notes, and gathered potential themes, categories, and sub-categories among multiple interviews. As this happened, possible theories relevant to the relationships between emerging categories were also noted. These categories and hypotheses were then sorted to create an organizational structure for the writing phase.

In retrospect, I primarily used this process to extract important threads and sub-threads from the interview text. Any repetitions in main themes across interviews were noted, as well as variations and similarities in detail and explanation. As this analysis occurred continuously through the interview process, I was able to adapt subsequent conversations to confirm and gain further insight into evolving themes. This was accomplished by asking additional follow-up questions and allowing interviewees to elaborate more on themes I had identified as being of key interest.

In addition, it was important to me during the interviews, and during the coding process, to notice participants' descriptions of what project relationships, tasks, and outcomes had been truly

engaging to them, generated a sense of excitement, and had been emotionally affecting. Even though these expressions of high interest may not have necessarily been shared by others through the interviews, they represent potentially important highlights of the projects. Mohr and Watkins (2003), proponents of appreciative inquiry, encourage this form of qualitative data collection, rather than relying strictly on repeated or the most commonly occurring themes. Such information may reflect critical project strengths and examples of excellence.

Following the process of coding and making notes on the interviews, I determined the following major themes and sub-themes. These are discussed in detail, in addition to descriptions of the project participants, and their responses to my questions, in Chapter 4 of this dissertation:

1. The Relationship Between the Strategic Plan and the Projects
2. From Ideas to Action: Motivation, Individual Context and Project Launch
3. Reflections on Project and Group Process
4. Collaboration Across Cultures
5. Marking Movement through Project Evolution: Key Experiences and Shared Stories
6. Reflections on Creativity, Work and Personal Values
7. Individual and Organizational Project Outcomes

CHAPTER 4 - Interpretation of the Findings

4.1 The Purpose of This Chapter

Following decriptions of the project participants, this chapter presents seven thematic sections (as defined in the final section of Chapter 3) based on the predominant ideas expressed in the interviews by the participants. These themes emerged in response to the interview questions I developed in the spirit of appreciative inquiry, and thus are linked in subject to the original questions but also indicative of ideas being extended as the conversations evolved. The participants' responses from the three projects have been integrated largely by theme, rather than by individual project, as it seemed that merging the comments in this way would allow for enhanced understanding across projects and create more potential for direct comparison. Note that the themes from this section have been further distilled into specific recommendations for effective project-making, which are then discussed in the concluding chapter.

In determining the themes to be discussed in Chapter 4, the broad-based questions included in the project summary (Fig. 4.0) were revisited. The aim of this was to ensure alignment between the participants' ideas and the broader purposes of this study, and to present ideas illuminating the key areas of inquiry. (Note that the order of the themes included in this discussion section differs somewhat from that of the following questions as I have chosen to weave the material together in a way that facilitates the greatest flow and transition.)

Figure 4.0 Research Questions from Project Summary

First, what motivates individuals working within post-secondary systems to envision, initiate

and proceed with collaborative projects that are complex, innovative, and possibly exist initially outside of formalized strategic plans? How do these projects move from conception to implementation and how is this process affected by such factors as desire for social change, creative expression, individual and collective growth, educational development, collaborative opportunities and challenge?

Second, once engaged in these projects which often involve individuals from different areas or cultures within the same institution, what are the perceived challenges, benefits and outcomes that participants encounter? What are the strengths that participants bring as co-constructing partners and how do they define their peak experiences during project implementation? How are challenges best addressed prior to and during the project implementation phase and how can defined best practices be fostered?

4.2 The Interviewees

There is a vitality, a life force, a quickening that is translated through you into action ...a blessed unrest that keeps us marching and makes us more alive than the others.

- Martha Graham, Dancer/Choreographer, *The Life and Work of Martha Graham*

The individual participants interviewed for this study are highlighted in this section, rather than the earlier methodology chapter, with the goal of connecting their self-descriptions more closely with their actual responses. The first section of each oral interview was spent discussing the participant's professional roles, and the experiences (deemed important by the interviewee) leading to their project involvement. Here, a short biography of each participant based on that

discussion is presented, supplemented by photos if provided. Additionally, a key statement from each participant has been included with the bios to create transition into the next section focused on interpretation. By incorporating this information, my intention is twofold: First, to create a fuller context for the responses, which have been selectively chosen by theme and included later in this chapter; and second, to highlight this project as a social construction in written form - created through the mutual engagement of writer, interviewees and readers.

Judith Fearing - Selkirk College Nursing Program Instructor, Public Health/Clinical Nurse

Judith has a keen interest in global and community health. Her decades of experience include working with aboriginal Canadians as an outpost nurse in the north, coordinating a community health program for new mothers, teaching in the Selkirk College Nursing Program, and coordinating film festivals and other activities for Amnesty International.

"*Changes in health care come through community health versus acute care.*" (Guatemala Nursing Project)

Mary Ann Morris - Selkirk College Nursing Program Instructor, Community Activist

Mary Ann has worked in a wide range of community development, teaching and nursing settings. She taught for OXFAM Vancouver, worked with aboriginal groups in northern Canada, and developed a ten-year healthcare partnership in Nicaragua with GF Strong Hospital in Canada.

Mary Ann and Nursing Students with Guatemalan Children

"*Both decision making and power shift when one is always giving and one is always receiving. I realized that it could be reciprocal*." (Guatemala Nursing Project)

Kim Brown - Selkirk College Nursing Program Student

Kim decided to change careers after working previously as a social worker and then a flight attendant. She applied to nursing at Selkirk College as a potentially more rewarding career. With personal ties to Canadian aboriginal communities, Kim noticed similarities in healthcare challenges between north and south after participating in the project.

"*Particularly when people are marginalized, and don't have the funds of the social safety net, they have to, out of necessity, understand what they can do - and what can be done - themselves*." (Guatemala Nursing Project)

Joanne van der Ham - Selkirk College Nursing Program Instructor

Joanne has taught in the Selkirk College Nursing Program for more than 20 years. Previously, she worked as a nursing clinician at Grace Hospital in Vancouver. Joanne pioneered an earlier international experience for Selkirk nursing students based in Mexico.

"*People ask why we would want to take students out of the country when they could work with groups in Canada. Yes, we can see poverty and oppression here...but when I saw it in another country, I could remove some of my judgements and become less numb.*" (Guatemala Nursing Project)

Linda Wilkinson - Selkirk College International Education Department Head, Peace Studies Program Instructor

Linda holds an advanced degree from the European University for Peace Studies in Austria. She has taught and administered programs at Selkirk College for two decades, and has been involved in a wide range of international projects in China, Japan, Russia, Vietnam, the Georgia Republic and many other countries. Linda has received grants in support from ACCC-CIDA (Association of Canadian Community Colleges/Canadian International Development Agency), CBIE (Canadian Bureau of International Education), BCCIE (BC Centre for International Education), and the BC Ministry of Advanced Education. Linda is of Doukhobour heritage, and is an active member of the international Bahai community.

Linda and Myler Wilkinson

"*I've always felt very fortunate to be involved in international education - being able to communicate, find common language, find common ground. How can we help one another fulfill our lives' goals?*" (Mir Peace Centre Project and Georgia Workforce Development Project)

Myler Wilkinson - Selkirk College English and Peace Studies Program Instructor

Myler is married to Linda Wilkinson, and has worked collaboratively with her and independently on special projects in Russia, China and other countries for many years. He has a keen interest in Russian literature and culture - in particular Doukhobour culture - and as part of the Mir Centre, co-developed the Selkirk Peace Studies Program.

"*It became clear to me that people could come to the Mir Centre project and see a vision of their own dreams. We live in our community, but we're connected to the world*." (Mir Peace Centre Project)

Marilyn James - Selkirk College Aboriginal Student Advisor, Activist

Marilyn is a member of the Sinixt (Interior Salish), one of the aboriginal groups that previously inhabited the land on which Selkirk College is situated. She has worked as an advisor to aboriginal students at Selkirk College for 7 years, and previously held the same position at the University College of the Caribou. As a highly active advocate for social rights, education and health, Marilyn travels and speaks widely to community, regional and government groups.

Marilyn James and her Daughter

"*Failure is not failure. It could be not trying hard enough or not having support. I think that if you have an ability to understand what the social issues are, and the ability to articulate that, you can make change."* (Mir Peace Centre Project)

Liana Zwick - Selkirk College Human Resources Coordinator, Peace Activist

Liana has been employed at Selkirk College since 1995 when she began as the Health and Safety Officer. For a number of years, she worked on human rights education and issues at the college prior to taking on her current role. Liana is a part of the local Doukhobour community. "*I have a value system based on community, and how we treat one another as humans on this planet. It's not just about the Mir Centre at Selkirk College, but making a global impact. Unconditional positive regard applies day to day, but a project like this allows for exponential growth*." (Mir Peace Centre Project)

Duncan Grady - Selkirk College Peace Studies Program and Social Services Program Instructor

Duncan has been teaching in the Social Services Program at Selkirk College since 2000, after relocating from Chicago. His background in counselling psychology and creation spirituality contribute to his work delivering presentations and training to a range of organizations. Of Scottish and Blackfoot ancestry, Duncan is highly involved with his tribal headquarters in Montana, and has a strong interest in peace studies.

Duncan During the Mir Opening Ceremony

"*The need to be of service is important. These aren't times for complacency*." (Mir Peace Centre Project)

Marilyn Luscombe - Selkirk College President

Marilyn came to Selkirk College from College of the North Atlantic in Newfoundland, where she served as Director of Services, District Administrator and Vice President Academic over a period of 15 years. She chose to take on the role of Selkirk President because she felt it was a good fit, and was attracted to the region's multiculturalism and strong history in community. Her intense involvement in the Mir Centre began upon her presidency.

"*There are many ways to peace...and learnings we will always take from one another*." (Mir Peace Centre Project)

John J. Verigin, Jr. - Activist and Doukhobour Executive Director (USCC)

John has served as advisor to the Canadian Ambassador for Disarmament, as President of the Kootenay Regional United Nations Association, and as Peace and Disarmament Advocate for the United Nations in New York. He is highly involved in local, federal and international initiatives related to peace, justice, environmental and humanitarian issues. John's great-grandfather, Peter Verigin, led 6000 Doukhobours to the Kootenay region of British Columbia between 1908 – 1911, where they were able to create communal villages, follow their spiritual practices and develop agricultural and business initiatives in the region. (Refer to Section 1.6)

John J. Verigin, Dr. James Orbinski (Nobel Peace Prize Laureate), Randy Janzen

Mir Lecture Series

"*The umbrella agency for the Mir Project is Selkirk College, but it involved a lot of people coming together from different perspectives bringing it to fruition. We were walking the walk of the centre itself.*" (Mir Peace Centre Project)

Randy Janzen - Selkirk College Nursing Program and Peace Studies Instructor

Randy has been actively involved in multiple health and peace related projects in Canada and abroad. He has served as a human rights observer for Guatemalan refugees, a health policy advisor for post-war Kosovo, and a member of peacemaker teams in Israel and Palestine. Randy has worked in the Canadian north with aboriginal communities, and in Vancouver's lower eastside on AIDS prevention. As well as instructing in the Nursing and Peace Studies Programs, he was the Chair of the Selkirk School of Health and Human Services from 2004 -2007. Randy is married to fellow interviewee Mary Ann Morris. (Side note of possible interest: Randy Janzen is also currently enrolled in the Taos-Tilburg Ph.D. Program.)

"*I am a pacifist, someone who is working for a more just and peaceful world. I feel personally called to do that*." (Mir Peace Centre Project and Guatemalan Nursing Project)

Carol Retzlaff - Selkirk College School of Arts and Sciences Chair, and Biology Instructor

Carol has a strong interest in liberal arts and sciences education, and in particular the environmental stream within the Peace Studies Program. She heads the college Environmental Sustainability Committee and developed programming for the Mir Peace Centre.

"*This project has caught people's imagination...there are people all over the world who want to be here."* (Mir Peace Centre Project)

Elizabeth Lund - Selkirk College Chemistry Instructor

Elizabeth is an ordained Buddhist nun who lived in Thailand prior to working at Selkirk College, and coordinates a meditation group at the college. She joined the Mir Project several years after its inception in 2006.

"*The Mir Centre can be a touchstone....how can we influence the peace in our immediate area*?" (Mir Peace Centre Project)

Anni Holtby - Selkirk College Community Education Coordinator

Anni organizes conferences and other events related to Selkirk College, and has worked in community and continuing education for more than two decades. She has served as the continuing education representative on the Mir Programming Council, and provides liaison and support for courses and events provided to the community.

"*For a project such as this, creativity happens through synergy...it's not a one person show since there are so many aspects to it*." (Mir Peace Centre Project)

Neil Coburn - Selkirk College Dean of Instruction

Neil became interested in peace programming when he was a student at Waterloo University, which offers one of the oldest peace and conflict resolution programs in Canada. He is keenly interested in peace related initiatives such as Project Ploughshares. As part of his Dean's role, Neil has been responsible for the development of new Mir Peace Centre programming, and helped form an interdisciplinary programming council for that purpose.

"*My personal feeling is that peace can't be imposed but has to come from within. Any kind of programming that supports that is a good thing from my point of view*." (Mir Peace Centre Project)

Violet Kalesnikoff - Selkirk College Dean of Community, Corporate and International Development

Violet has been employed at the college for more than 30 years, first as an instructor and department head in the Applied Business Program, and later as Dean of Career and Technical Programs. Her personal background is Doukhobour, and many of her ancestors immigrated to Canada from the Georgia area.

Vi Kalesnikoff and Lali Ghogheliani in Georgia

(3rd and 2nd from right)

Violet developed a Vietnam project in conjunction with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) about 15 years ago, which like the current workforce development project, focused on training the trainers and providing students with practical, work related skill sets.

"*One of the things that I really believe is that knowledge is the key to change and success*." (Georgia Workforce Development Project)

Lali Ghogheliani - Georgian Technical University Centre of Professional Development Head, Professor of Hydrological Engineering

Lali holds multiple positions at Georgian Technical University, and has been involved in many international projects related to educational reform and hydrological engineering. Working

with international partners, foundations and government, she is very involved in improving the infrastructure at the university and the nation.

"*A successful project needs strong competencies on both sides*." (Georgia Workforce Development Project)

Giuseppe Liberatore - Thompson Rivers University International Business Programming Coordinator

As part of his role at Thompson Rivers University, Guiseppe is responsible for institutional partnerships that focus on the creation of joint business degree programs. He currently teaches courses in international business and ethics at T.R.U. as well as partner institutions abroad, and is very invested in working on global projects which encompass his areas of specialization.

"*It's important to allow direct communication between specialists working on a project rather than having a very top down, hierarchal structure*." (Georgia Workforce Development Project)

Rhys Andrews - Selkirk College Dean of Instruction

Rhys previously collaborated with Violet Kalesnikoff on a CIDA training project in Vietnam focused on forestry, his subject specialization. For the Georgia project, he provided student assessment training for faculty at the main university campus in Tbilisi, in addition to leadership training for students.

"*We describe these projects as being done from the corner of our desks, but a better description is that they are at the centre of our hearts*." (Georgia Workforce Development Project)

4.3 Theme One - The Relationship between the Strategic Plan and the Projects

In the introductory chapter of this dissertation, the Selkirk College institutional structure and strategic plan, including vision, mission and values statements, were presented and discussed. A question pertaining to the creation and development of complex projects involves their relationship to official plans: According to project participants, do such plans directly drive the creation of projects, at least initially, and if so, to what degree? How are projects guided through the process of their development by stated strategic guidelines? Do innovative projects exist outside of formal plans and institutional structure? What do project participants consider to be the challenges related to working with formalized plans?

The three projects this dissertation focuses on, the Georgia Workforce Development Project (GWDP), the Mir Peace Centre (MPC), and the Guatemala Nursing Project (GNP), share strong international components including staff, student and/or faculty global mobility; program and curriculum development created in collaboration with international partners; content themes focused on cross-cultural education and awareness; and an emphasis on global social and economic development issues.

Certainly, elements of all three projects fit effectively within the stated College strategic plan, particularly since the outcome statements are fairly open and generic - rather than overly prescriptive. The Selkirk College Strategic Directions document (2005) states that "Relationships with learners, organizations and communities throughout the world foster greater cross-cultural understanding and awareness, while enhancing learning and program opportunities. Selkirk College will build strong international relationships, create opportunities for international experiences and enhance capacity for international programming."

My respondents provided a range of perspectives on the relationship between the formal College strategic plan and the projects they had been involved in. It was obvious that they had varying knowledge of the plan; that is, some interviewees were aware of the specific content within the strategic plan, while others had minimal or very little understanding of the document. Several participants felt that it provided valuable guidelines or parameters to the project activities. Some stated that the plan had directly driven the initiation and continued implementation of the project, particularly if they had been substantially involved in the strategic plan development process. A few participants were neutral toward, or even dismissive of, the value and practical application of the plan in relation to projects.

The following responses from members of the same project, the Mir Peace Centre, demonstrate a range of opinions regarding the effect of the college organizational framework, in the form of the strategic plan and broader structures, to the creation and progress of the project. It is interesting to note that the first respondent below mentions that the awareness of the strategic plan increased as the project developed. This may be due to the fact that the project committee structure, according to this respondent, became more formalized as it evolved. As well, the same respondent notes that the college exhibits an openness toward creative projects, while contributing the beneficial structure of a strategic plan. It is noteworthy that of the three projects, the college president was most involved with the Mir Peace Centre, and her involvement may have helped engender greater focus on the strategic plan as it related to the project; certainly, the respondents involved in Mir discussed the plan in more detail than other project participants.

The majority of respondents seemed to indicate that the institutional strategic plan functions as a useful, and contributing structure to project work, and that it can be deliberately utilized to guide and define projects - both to participants and outside stakeholders. There was a sense,

however, that over-reliance on formal organizational documents is overly constraining and limits creativity and new initiatives. Several interviewees mentioned that allowing flexibility and "flow" between potentially radical ideas "on the fringes" (versus those within the traditional organizational "centre") and the strategic plan, ensures ratified growth and innovation.

In post-secondary education, there's a huge license for creativity. Selkirk College has developed this even more than other institutions. It's a combination of strategic plans and new initiatives. There are people in programs driven by creativity who know nothing about institutional plans. With the Mir Centre, there was an awareness of plan, especially as time went on. In the beginning, it was really fluid. In 2004, formal structure was put into place, such as the programming council. I was formally invited by the president's office to sit on that committee and I accepted. (R.J.; MPC)

I didn't work on this project because of organizational goals, but because I thought it was a good idea from the beginning. Fortunately, the college saw the project as contributing to the plan and review, which helped to make it credible. Other people began to see it in a different light, and the president made reference to the strategic plan. A good plan makes these things possible because it is timely. That sense of timing is important. (L.W.; MPC)

There are many ways that these things happen. Institutions are innately conservative...some of the more radical ideas may come from small groups or individuals and then how do you link up with the institution? Ideas coming from the

margins have to find the centre quickly. The bigger the project, the more quickly you have to get support. You have to find a way to work with groups and the institution. (M.W.; MPC)

Marilyn brought more of a structure by putting the project into the plan and putting it forward to the management committee. It was good to have structure, but sometimes it loses a little bit of the grassroots piece. It's a give and take with the goals you want to attain. I was nervous that some things were getting lost in our structure. (L.Z.; MPC)

It's important to recognize that certain forms and structures suit certain things better. It's nice to be free of organizational limitations but a candle can burn to its own destruction. People can become disconnected from others and disappointed that others don't share in the passion. At this point in time, there are processes involved if you want to engage others, whether they are secular or spiritual. For anything to be successful, you're going to want to bring others on board…all of those others have their anchors. How to accommodate that and yet not lose the sense of direction?

Sometimes the institutional checks and balances are a pain but sometimes save us. I'm very proud of Selkirk College for getting involved in the Mir Centre...once this project was recognized in a formal way by the College, it was a sign that we place a value on it. Whether we're talking about conflict resolution on a local or global level, we need these skill sets. Or, we're not being all that we can be. (J.J.V.; MPC)

My gut feeling is that an institutional plan is necessary, but it's not a driving force for the ideas. Looking back to the plan, they influence the projects, but they can function fine without them. It's a funny thing…you're constraining the person by making them fit the plan. From our level, it would be go up to other people. There really seemed to be support from all levels. (E.L.; MPC)

In terms of the strategic plan affecting projects or vice versa, there's a bit of both going on. The projects for which we have demonstrated there are strategic goals continue and have support. I worry about activities that don't fit into plans and are individually driven. (C.R.; MPC)

Fiscal realities often influence choices made during project creation and implementation. In addition to commenting on the strategic plan, the next respondent mentions the impact of attempting to weigh future results - in this case, the number of potential full-time enrolments in the new Peace Studies Program - against long term decision making. During a period of provincial government reductions to public colleges, the initial and ongoing investment required to begin a new program, and in the case of the Mir Centre, a major building reconstruction, has been a major factor.

For an organization to remain current and relevant, continual effort must be directed toward innovation in a range of areas, and yet, the challenge is to make strong choices from multiple possibilities. The tendency is to rely on previously successful, more conservative choices when faced with potentially unknown outcomes; however, it may be the riskier, less typical ideas which can, when brought into fruition, set an organization apart. The following participant also

perceives the formalized strategic plan as being secondary to the initial interest and efforts of founding individuals in developing the project.

> *I don't think that the strategic plan of the College enabled or facilitated this. I think that the concept of the Mir Centre was held by Linda, Myler and J.J. for a long time. I think that the Mir Centre certainly was supported by the college or it wouldn't have happened, but I don't see it as a function of the strategic plan. First of all, I don't know that the strategic plan is all that well known, or given much credence. The College often acts from a position of fear, which is a major obstacle.*

> *The question we were asked was...how many full time student equivalents (FTE's) would it generate? It was a risk. When organizations become afraid, the quotient for taking risks reduces. Regardless of what a strategic plan says, organizations are people, and when people become afraid, they constrict. Then the opportunity to become innovative, to take risks, to be creative…is reduced. Budget cuts add to that fear. (D.G.; MPC)*

The Selkirk College president discusses the importance of the strategic plan providing a comprehensive sense of direction, while not restricting creative ideas. At the same time, the challenge of working with broad based directives is mentioned. She highlights the specific component of the plan stressing that the unique identity of the institution and region must be considered in tandem with enhancing the student experience. As a public college encompassing a fairly large geographical region, Selkirk is mandated to provide access to the communities it

serves in widely varied program areas. However, providing depth and breadth in multiple disciplines while highlighting the region's "unique identity" is a challenge.

> *There's variety to our strategic plan, although some people see it as not giving specific direction. If we allow a strategic plan to inhibit us, it doesn't work. Sometimes it can be too specific. As part of the plan, we have a vision of building the student experience based on our distinct identity. It's a pretty big vision and it needs some containment. One of our challenges is to build on our identity while remaining a comprehensive institution for our learners. (M.L.; MPC)*

Similarly, the co-founder of the Georgia Workforce Development project refers to the unique regional identity of the college mentioned in the plan, as well as the mandate to develop relationships, particularly those which are global. She also mentions the president's support of this aspect of the plan. Several members of the Mir Centre emphasized that having Marilyn Luscombe's highly vocal support supported the actualization of the project. It is also noteworthy that this respondent is a member of the Doukhobour community in Castlegar, as is the other participant she mentions, J.J.

> *Marilyn has always felt that as a college we need to develop relationships with countries connected with our region. Georgia has that connection...Italy could be another possibility. That's a way to look at things...to build on the relationships within our own community. I had talked to J.J. about developing a connection with Georgia and Russia. He phoned me, said that he was going to Georgia and would introduce me*

to key players in the Doukhobour community there. We met with the minister and said we were interested in a CIDA project. Georgia was one area CIDA was supporting at that time. (V.K.; GWDP)

4.3.1 An Overview of Theme One

In summary, while strategic plans were considered by participants to often contribute to the success of organizational projects, the understanding of plan content and the consistency of adherence to such plans varied by individual and group. The Selkirk College strategic plan was referred to most often by the members of the Mir Project. A commonly shared tenet, for the most part by all participants, was the need for a degree of flexibility within a strategic plan. This permits creativity to flourish, allows for a range of projects to be potentially accommodated within the organization, and promotes increased institutional responsiveness. Flexibility, in the form of stated objectives which are defined but not overly narrow, and an approach to vision, mission and values statements which allows for some interpretation, support greater risk-taking. This willingness to make innovative choices in regard to programming and other areas may not occur in organizations which are forced to follow highly defined plans with little opportunity for "creative license".

Beyond the need for flexibility, there was a subtle call on the part of the participants, particularly those involved with the Mir Centre, to revisit the very definition of strategic planning - how it is imbedded within the very infrastructure of the organization, how it is communicated to varying levels of stakeholders, and how it is developed and revised over time. Several interviewees discussed their sense that strategic plans can be overly restrictive, limited

and distant from the reality of the work that occurs. This trend of responses may reflect the shifting emphasis within forward-thinking organizations to revisit and reinvent the way their own organizations are defined and the collaborative processes which drive them forward. The challenge is to balance the many social, economic and political elements involved on an institutional macro level, with the (often competing and equally critical) interests and needs of the individuals who comprise it.

There was a tendency to appreciate the function of strategic plans; without them, it was noted, individuals and groups could be like candles "…burning to their own destruction". Strategic plans provide structure and goal-setting opportunities that can reduce the chances of academic endeavors being short-lived or chaotic. Lastly, respondents indicated that educational organizations benefit from plans that are inward and outward focused: an effective strategic plan is not simply based within the organization, but is situated in the contextual world in which it resides and stresses inter-connectivity across regions and cultures.

4.4 Theme Two - From Ideas to Action: Motivation, Individual Context and Project Launch

Individuals become involved in project work, and commit to them over a period of time in a myriad of ways and for different purposes. In the case of these three project case studies, some individuals were formally asked to join, such as through the president's office. Others were connected to project founders and earlier participants, through common departmental work, and naturally gravitated toward the projects. Several volunteered on their own to participate shortly after learning that the project had been initiated and others joined later in the process. The

common element was that all participants I interviewed, regardless of how they had become involved, possessed what was often self-described as a "passion" for one or more key elements of the project and its outcomes, on both a personal and collective level.

It became apparent through the interview process that a connection existed between activities and interests participants had pursued in the past or hoped to pursue in the future, and their current role in the projects. That is, their involvement was seemingly not arbitrary, but rather embedded within the larger context of their working and personal lives over time. Some interviewees indicated a strong conscious understanding of this connection from the beginning of their project involvement, and had become deliberately involved for this reason. Others came to understand their investment in the projects more slowly, as they clarified their individual roles, gained a deeper understanding of the projects, and began collaborating with others. Many participants commented on how their participation would affect their future professional and personal choices.

> *When I'm sitting on a committee, I don't usually think about my own values, but with this project it was really about resonating something within me. When I first became involved, it was about getting to know everyone, their positions, the history and coming to understand the passion involved in the project. I felt more comfortable about being able to contribute after figuring out my role which was to keep the community liaison open. I've been wanting to do a master's degree, creating something unique and special, a niche for our area that resonates out to the world. I may not have chosen this route if I wasn't on the Mir Centre...I can see where the peace, reconciliation and change resonate with myself. (A.H.; MPC)*

The big thing for me is that these projects fit into my area of specialization. In this case, it helps me realize that I can apply my own learning. My own education seems worthwhile. I teach courses in international business and ethics and these projects have a lot of information about ethics. (G.L.; GWDP)

When the college reorganized in 2003, the Mir programming aspects became part of my dean's position and the goals of Mir fit well with my own values. It was a new initiative and it was exciting. I had supported these types of initiatives in the past...was a student at the University of Waterloo, which has the oldest peace studies and conflict resolution program in Canada. (N.C.; MPC)

This respondent, a co-founder of the Guatemala Nursing Project, discusses her initial efforts in attempting to initiate an international student nursing project in Cuba, and the difficulty getting others on board in order to move forward. She later joined forces with a colleague in her department to help mobilize a similar project in a different country. Her colleague's strength of conviction and personal prior experience in Guatemala helped garner the mandatory support required from the other nursing faculty when the idea was presented.

The personal piece is that I love travel and history, meeting people and hearing about their stories, and I wanted to pull that into my work. All of these things are a big part of nursing. About 6 years, ago I thought about how we could create an international practice for students. I went to Cuba by myself and learned a lot about their primary

healthcare system, but other faculty didn't latch onto it.

Fortunately, the next year, Mary Ann was working on her master's degree which included work in international nursing. She has a strong voice and used her data. She had a lot of experience in Guatemala, and whether it's Cuba or Guatemala, it's about the students having the rich experience. Mary Ann, Ruth and I used our professional development funds to go to Guatemala first and we got a sense of what it would be for students. (J.V.D.H.; GNP)

The primary founder of the nursing project describes the preparation and planning she dedicated to the project prior to initiation by doing research on the region, completing her masters degree in a relevant subject area, and working within the college strategic plan. Her personal process of preparation speaks to the relationship between having high levels of expertise in the lead group members, and the increased likelihood of project success.

As I developed my practice, I was increasingly looking at it from a much more global perspective. In the undergraduate program, we are hired as generalists, but each of us has a passion. Mine is health between north and south, and having a framework to work with that. I saw the potential for the Guatemala project but needed to increase my credibility.

I got my Master's focused on internationalization and healthcare disciplines. Selkirk College was already looking at internationalization, but there were competing

understandings and I wanted to explore this. I've now done this project for 4 years, and I'm hopeful that all students have had transformational learning events...how they see others in the world is changed. (M.A.M.; GNP)

Why do some ideas result in tangible projects being comprehensively developed while other ideas stagnate or are only partially realized? Several of the respondents discussed the factors contributing to a project being supported, launched and effectively implemented. Following, the Selkirk College president considers the impact of timing, intuition, ability and effective leadership on project development, support and success.

There are different factors when considering which creative ideas work, and which don't. Timing comes into it, and intuition - or a lack of intuition - about why or why not an idea has a place. From my perspective, the use of intuition in the context of history and culture set inside the context of an institution like ours, is critical. There is a need as a leader to help people learn how to bring their ideas to fruition. It is a combination of the initiator and the responders, giving people honest and appropriate feedback and the support to work on it within the institutional process. Resources, fairness, equitability all increase the likelihood of success. We have to see the big picture and the opportunities. (M.L.; MPC)

The impetus for the Mir Project is related by one of the co-founders, who also states that timing and support of college leadership were critical elements. The historical, cultural and physical components of the original idea were well aligned, and, through the focused effort of

the co-founders, caught the attention of the Selkirk College president - who then became a major proponent of the initiative.

> *Linda and I would go for walks along the trails around the college, and our favourite was around an old Doukhobour house - which was falling apart but beautiful. We realized in 1999 that if something wasn't done quickly, all remnants of the building would disappear, and we had this general idea about creating a peace centre. We realized that we had some responsibility to get this going in time, and the idea happened to be in a certain time and in a certain place where people were interested in it. I spoke to Leo Perra, the previous Selkirk College president, and he said it was an idea whose time had come. Later, we had Marilyn Luscombe's commitment. We wanted to create a project that was real in our community and our time. (M.W.; MPC)*

4.4.1 An Overview of Theme Two

In summary, interviewees involved in all three projects referred to an existing or evolving passion for the projects they were involved in – in many cases, this engagement was evident years prior to becoming involved in their current respective projects. While participants exhibited varying degrees of attachment toward the projects, in terms of continuing in the same roles in the long-term, most indicated that their personal interests had been a key factor in their ongoing participation and what they perceived to be project success. Furthermore, the work they had contributed resonated with other areas of their lives, and impacted what they saw as being potential future undertakings on both professional and personal levels. Many commented on the

commendable efforts of their project colleagues, and seemed truly appreciative of - and inspired by - others' contributions.

Timing was mentioned frequently as being a critical element to the launch and success of project endeavors. As one interviewee noted, "Timing comes into it, and intuition - or a lack of intuition - about why or why not an idea has a place." While some ideas were nurtured over years, others had an immediate need to manifest quickly due to a range of influences. Members of the Guatemalan Nursing Project commented on the importance of working within the scheduling needs of community and international partners, of being responsive to changing community opportunties for students while in Guatemala, and of working within specific timeframes to fundraise and plan.

4.5 Theme Three - Reflections on Project and Group Process

Of interest for this research are the phases of project development in relation to how participants work together. Specifically, how does a project evolve in terms of structural and committee process, and what elements of a project do participants experience as being critical to its development? What challenges are experienced by participants at various points and how are they navigated? What are the effects of choices made during challenging times?

Following, project participants reflect on their experience of the development process, and offer ideas on factors contributing to success. The following two interviewees discuss the key initial phase of the Mir Centre, noting how substantial time was taken to bring people together, align their objectives and discuss potentialities. Additionally, the relationship of committee size to effectiveness is noted - a factor also brought forward by other respondents.

You have to start off by visioning, to make sure that people have the same vision or can articulate what the differences are. We took the time to have day-long visioning sessions, and developed mission and value statements for the Mir Centre that we could refer to. There were minor differences in vision, but overall they were complementary rather than divisive. In the beginning, working on the project was really fluid - a lot of people with energy and there were no sub-committees. In 2004, a more formal structure was put into place, including the programming council, which I was asked to join. The committee was smaller than the previous ones - about 6 people - and much more manageable. There were people who had long term interest, but also those with historical investment. (R.J.; MPC)

Everyone needs to be allowed to express his/her own vision. Otherwise, you're halfway through the project and people are going off in different directions. If you can accept everyone's vision, fine tune what that means for them, and then look at it collectively, you come up with something quite strong. That's crucial because people are sitting at the table with their own agendas. It's important to find out what people's strengths are...what they have fun doing. For the people who had the original vision and now see it taking flight, it's about looking at history and bringing in new people's ideas. (A.H.; MPC)

As with the earlier response, the following two interviewees note the project progression from a fairly open, flexible structure to one that is more "bureaucratic" with some resulting fiscal

and organizational challenges. This period, several years into the project, seems to be one of potential shift as initial goals have been achieved, and new objectives and structures suitable to the emerging phase of the project are in the process of being determined.

> *The first three or four years of the project were "the heroic age" when we weren't constrained by the logistics and it was free and open. Now we're working through the bureaucratic period and getting organized for the next phase. There have been periods of gloom around bureaucracy, and visions that didn't mesh. At times, there has been a lack of energy and not enough finances to do very much. But, just look at what we've accomplished. It's shocking how much we've achieved. We're at a point now when we're trying to figure out what the next three to five years will look like, and looking at a financial plan. We may have a coordinator or a director...someone to get things going from here. (M.W.; MPC)*

> *There were resources and support for programming...it was well supported from the president down. Other than that, the funding has been disappointing because we would like to support additional things like summer institutes, events. Many in the group saw a larger picture of what would happen. In many ways, the last community council meeting we had worked. All ideas were welcome and sometimes there was a spark of surprise. But since the 40th anniversary [of Selkirk College], the goals have become more vague. We haven't yet figured out how to make realistic parameters for ourselves. It's one of those projects that the college needs to say, "this is real and this is something we do." (C.R.; MPC)*

Now the Mir Project is in the do or die phase. I don't mean that in the literal death, but conceptually, realistically it could be a very cutting edge - wonderful in terms of infiltrating cross-cultural lines, or it could become the diamond no one gets to touch. If the people who need it and who these changes are for don't get to foster them or be involved in that change, it becomes very sterile. I can see where the possibility of that lies, even though there are a lot of people working very hard. (M.J.; MPC)

The Selkirk College president comments on the current stage of the Mir Project, including the need to define new goals, revisit challenges and address organizational planning.

Now we're working on a strategic plan for Mir, including a business plan to move forward. There are lots of questions: What kind of structure will we have? What are the outcomes we want to achieve? What is it going to take to engage the community? What kind of expertise do we need? I think we can have a broad spectrum, but I will have to be convinced that the leadership will have the capacity to do that. I see so much potential around it. (M.L.; MPC)

The critical importance of meeting challenges with frequent, effective communication between stakeholders involved with the Georgia Project is noted by this interviewee, as well as the need to be flexible and adapt as project and environmental conditions shift.

A lot of time has been spent with the three of us partners together - and our challenges

are met with communication. We've asked, "What can we do?" "How is it going to happen?" Our biggest challenges have been working within the funding body rules and keeping our voices heard as the project proceeds. The Georgia teachers are taking ownership, but now they want more diplomas instead of two. The funding can be stretched to include more, but that requires more approval. All of our programs, to be approved by the ministry, have to follow the new EU model. (V.K.; GWDP)

4.5.1 An Overview of Theme Three

In summary, the group process for the majority of interviewees generally involved an open-ended and more flexible approach in the beginning phases. This allowed members to exchange ideas freely and exercise creative initiatives within the group. By starting initially with a less structured approach, the groups had the time and space needed to discuss, define and refine individual and group goals. Uniformly, the interviewees felt the early stages were a critical time to align themselves with one another, and that without that period, agendas may have been overlooked, causing unnecessary future conflict.

As time passed and projects grew, increasing in complexity, participants tended to lay down more specific, concrete guidelines and structures, including sub-committees. Dividing into such task-forces provided a size reduction of members from the whole group, which was generally seen as an asset. Members of the Mir Centre, in particular, mentioned that there seemed to be greater success and efficiency with activities when working on smaller committees – that communication improved and that individuals were more involved in specific areas of greatest personal interest. Although some felt encumbered initially by what they referred to as the

seemingly beaurocratic need for planning, most ultimately felt it added needed structure and refinement to a project growing in complexity.

4.6 Theme Four - Collaboration Across Cultures

A common thread between the Mir Peace Centre, Guatemala Nursing Experience and Georgia Workforce Development Initiative is that they all bring together individuals with diverse geographical, historical, academic, spiritual, and political backgrounds for the purpose of developing and sustaining project initiatives. As previously mentioned, Morgan (1997) describes a unique culture as consisting of individuals with shared frames of reference that are continually created, communicated and sustained.

With this description in mind, it is apparent that the three projects each have developed their own specific cultures, and (in some cases) subcultures, and that they are formed by individuals coming to the project work from a multitude of backgrounds. Although this cultural diversity guarantees a healthy range of perspectives and approaches - essential for project evolution - it is also responsible for tension and even dissent, whether the cultural differences are across continents or departments.

In this section, interviewees offer clarification on the types of challenges and advantages encountered in this regard, and ideas on how they can be effectively navigated. While the first three responses relate to working with global partners, the final several discuss cultural differences and considerations within the same institution. The first respondent following notes the importance of being aware of one's own cultural biases when engaging in communication with international partners, particularly when a guest at the other's home country. The second

discusses the reality of collaborating on a project with an international partner who has slightly different priorities, and how that can be bridged with communication.

I had the heads up that it was common for the Georgians to argue with each other there in front of other people...in a manner that in our culture we wouldn't accept. If it was a North American session, you would take a break, but there we just carried on. They had no problems with it, and there wasn't much intervention. It fits into a negotiation strategy because allowing them to do that allows negotiations to proceed. We can't force them to adopt our meeting traits or be imperialistic about our culture. (G.L., GWDP)

When I first went to Georgia, I felt there was a frustration among the people. They are a proud people that needed to know how to use their skills to change, and if there is an opportunity to share what we know and help others, we should do it. However, you can't impose your values. You need to be a support, but not the lead. To me, with this project, I'm enabling but not directing.

There were some challenges working with our American partners and negotiating funding. Our funding could not be used to pay faculty, while the American project allowed for this. They didn't have funding for developing materials, but our funding could pay for that. They were constantly looking for more funding to enhance what they were doing. We were torn between what we already had and what we could be doing with more money in the future. (V.K. GWDP)

This nursing project participant broaches two critical points: First, she suggests that the Selkirk group collaborates constructively and supportively with the Guatemalan partners on project design - rather than imposing specific outcomes on the partners. Second, she notes that outside observers can meet in a positive way with powerful local stakeholders to affect change.

> *We didn't realize how much our Guatemalan partners would appreciate us coming and how it validated their work. Sometimes other groups felt that they were going to teach the people there. We did have some teaching plans that the partners asked for, but it was a small part of what it was about. The people there providing these services are usually doing it voluntarily...it means a lot to them to hear that we can see what they're doing with their limited resources.*

> *During the war, everyone there trying to provide health care was threatened. Now it's safer...and they are very committed to their vision. The government doesn't provide any services for 80% of the people, and corporate development keeps this in place. We met with the CIDA grants person and a member of the embassy. Our job was to put our point across but not to be rude. (J.F., GNP)*

The following interviewees comment on the challenges and benefits of diversity, focused on the immediate participant group based at the college. The first response below notes the deliberated effort she has infused into the project for the purpose of bringing fellow faculty into the initiative, sustaining their interest, and supporting their professional and personal

development. The second set of comments suggests that the group's shared understanding of the overall value of the project motivated members to negotiate differences.

> *I critically analyzed who the stakeholders were and build alliances and networks. Joanne and I come from different paradigms around internationalization, but we have complementary approaches. Faculty see us as working together to bridge differences. This is not Mary Ann's pet project, but the program's project. The way we've been able to handle dissent is to encourage people to become involved and respond to curiosity. We set up a system for faculty to apply for PD funds to have their own international nursing experience. Now, many have traveled abroad with different experiences. (M.A.M., GNP)*

> *I loved the diversity of the people in our group. A diversity of ideas and approaches helps you come up with that greater end product. Diversity lends strengths, but also provides opportunities for conflict. Because of the group recognition of the strength of the project, we would work through conflict to do it. (L.Z., MPC)*

The Mir Centre, through project participation, programming, and the development of the various aspects of the physical site, brought together various cultural groups that had lived and worked on the land historically. Two such groups, the Doukhobours and Sinixt, had experienced longstanding tension over many years; the Mir Centre created opportunity for reconciliation and continued collaboration. The next two participants, from the Doukhobour and Sinixt communities respectively, discuss this process.

The project brought in diverse ethnic and philosophical streams from the Kootenay area, including the aboriginal community, Quaker community and other secular organizations. That outreach is continuing; it's not a closed circle and it's not meant to be closed. It was great to bring in the aboriginal community, because they were and are going through their challenges. It gives them respect and the recognition that they were important to the history of this area and still are.

The decision making process during the project actually strengthened through the challenges. That's the whole idea of the centre: non-violent, conflict resolution. The process of healing hearts, mending minds, soothing spirits and recognizing what was right and wrong in the past. Being respectful of the people sitting at the table with you. Ultimately, the project reflected the spirit of the centre that it was meant to be. (J.J.V.; MPC)

For years, people were not willing to look at the historical reality of the landscape. I was aware of the Mir initiative and my involvement started with a request to have my elders bless the ground. J.J. and I were at a public meeting, and I talked about Doukhobour and Sinixt history which wasn't very pleasant. I told him that we needed to deal with our common history. When I am affected by something, I want to deal with it. Sit together and face it and come to some type of resolution. (M.J.; MPC)

4.6.1 An Overview of Theme Four

In summary, participants from all three projects commented that the diversity of members comprising their groups was, first and foremost, a major asset. Whether individuals were from different departments within Selkirk College, worked at a range of insitutions, originated from varied cultural backgrounds or were based in other countries, the diversity they contributed was thought to generate a greater cross-pollination of ideas and strengths – and to enfuse projects with purpose and momentum.

This perceived strength, even in the face of adversity, was powerful enough, according to several respondents, to help move groups past dissent. When conflict did occur, there was a stronger commitment to overcome it – in part, because an appreciation for, and sensitivity toward the group's diversity was firmly established, and also due to the fact that attaining over-riding project goals drove a desire to find resolution.

Members of all three projects talked about the value of preparing for the possibility of dissent. It was assumed that with varying cultures working together there could be, at times, a need for understanding in the face of potentially increased chances of conflict. Awareness of cultural practices and possible biases was increased through group discussion, orientation and planning; this process of understanding enabled participants to approach conflict in a collaborative and positive manner.

4.7 Theme Five - Marking Movement through Project Evolution: Key Experiences and Shared Stories

In this section, participants provide insight into events and experiences they consider key to the healthy evolution of their projects. The first set of comments below emphasize the importance of the Mir Centre blessing ceremony event, citing it as an opportunity for the college and regional community to publicly share project progress, witness various cultural groups express their commitment to the project, and physically experience the Mir building and site. Many of the Mir project interviewees cited the importance of the event, which seemed to positively affect both the solidarity and focus of the group. Furthermore, as individuals discussed the ceremony during the interviews, they indicated that there had been ongoing discussion among the project participants regarding its critical impact, and that an annual anniversary of the event was communally marked and celebrated.

> *Something that was significant, that created and maintained synergy, was the blessing ceremony that took place on the Mir land. Many, including J.J., were there and it was opened by Sinixt elders. There had been a rift historically between the two cultural groups, but they were brought together...it's important to celebrate each phase. (L.Z.; MPC)*

> *During the blessing ceremony, J.J. bowed his head to the ground in front of one of the Sinixt elders, who was 92 years old at the time. The elder said that the Mir Centre*

brought people together through education. It was an important moment of reconciliation between these two nations. (L.W.; MPC)

During the 2001 ceremony an elder Sinixt woman did the sweet grass ritual, and J.J. Verigin knelt on the ground to represent the healing of the relationship. It was an acknowledged as an extraordinary initiative that helped to mend cultural divides. There was always a common spirit that may have been articulated in various ways...it was larger than words and kept the diversity of views together despite all odds. The mission we articulated from the beginning was "understanding and building cultures of peace". The opening ceremony and that date have been important....we have stopped each year to celebrate our progress, even though it was slow. I don't think we celebrate enough...it brings people together in recognition of one another and affirms what people have achieved. (M.L.; MPC)

Another frequent response to my interview question inquiring about key experiences was that direct student involvement was critical - and that it contributed both to the success of the project and to the respondent's own sense of "meaningfulness". That is, interviewees expressed that ongoing collaboration with students as part of the project process added a greater dimension of purpose and satisfaction to their personal involvement. Given that the majority of respondents work within educational settings, and that the projects benefit the student experience in a myriad of ways, this is not surprising; however, it provides an impetus for such projects to very deliberately create structured opportunities for students to get engaged.

What impresses me are things like the pictures for peace project...all of the pictures were done by the students. I see the effort and incentive they put into it on top of what they're doing. Now I'm chairing an environmental sustainability committee with faculty, staff and students...it's a feel good project. The interaction with students is very positive and one student in particular is so articulate and active. (C.R.; MPC)

It was very, very important to me that students be involved. Students helped to clear three walls of bricks during the reconstruction of the Mir house....it was mothers and daughters. Even though there were only a few of us, it didn't take a long time. I feel so connected to one of those young women...she is now doing women's studies and psychology at University of Victoria and we're still very close. There is a Rotary youth group that comes to the college every year, and the Mir Centre arbour is their favourite place. And all ages of students from the elementary level upwards come to Mir annually to learn traditional aboriginal skills such as storytelling and smoking salmon. (L.W.; MPC)

Having Anna here, as a student from Georgia was important...I spent a lot of time with her and it was good to see the project from the student perspective. Then, when she heard we were coming to Georgia, she invited us to stay with her family. It's just that I've gotten back more than I've given. (V.K.; GWDP)

There were other students with us who had never travelled. I saw their eyes open as they realized that we live somewhat in a paradise in Canada. For me, one of the key

experiences was observing the level of poverty in Guatemala. We were invited to homes where people had absolutely nothing. It was heart wrenching to see that those people would offer us what little they had. (K.B.; GNP)

4.7.1 An Overview of Theme Five

In summary, the evolution and achievement of these projects were furthered by shared celebrations, cermonies and rituals. In particular, the Guatemalan Nursing Project and Mir Project interviewees discussed the importance of regularly being involved in these types of activities: doing so provided participants with the joint opportunity to review their achievements, acknowledge progress made and take time to enjoy time together before continuing forward. Marking their collaborative work in this way infused members with a greater sense of solidarity, provided a deeper focus and sparked momentum for future efforts. Altogether it was found to be revitalizing.

For some with a challenging shared history, these special events represented a cultural healing that was essential to moving forward; this group included many Mir Project members involved with the initial opening event and subsequent anniversaries of the Centre. For others, an equally important key aspect of their project work was the opportunity to get students directly involved in various ways, and to share with them their knowledge and experiences. As teachers and administrators, many interviewees saw student growth and participation as being the central purpose of their work, and sought to engage them in the projects, either directly as participants or through related programming initatives.

4.8 Theme Six - Reflections on Creativity, Work, and Personal Values

During the interviews, respondents spoke frequently about their need to be engaged in work related projects that stimulated their creativity, offered the opportunity to collaborate with others in personally meaningful ways, and allowed them to contribute their skills effectively to causes they considered important. The following participants reflectively discuss these needs in relation to their respective projects, and to their work experiences in general. They offer insights into why they are motivated to participate in project work, what constitutes a "meaningful" experience, and how they can engage fully with others.

> *According to Buddhist philosophy, you can be ultimately involved but not consumed. As you take on more responsibilities, you can learn the skill of being able to step back and reflect. Is this the best way? Is what you're doing reflective of your intentions? The means have to reflect the end. As much as the world is proceeding in terms of globalization, a parallel phenomenon is taking place with little entities proliferating. People are realizing they have their own responsibilities as human beings in social and cultural groupings. We would like to advance without loss, but conflict is a part of human nature...we're not driven by instinct. How do we channel that conflict so it leads to beauty? (J.J.V.; MPC)*

> *I think that people come to their workplace with a passion for something. It often flavours everything they're doing and teaching, and they're looking for an opportunity to put an emphasis on that. (J.F.; GNP)*

Satisfaction drives people to take these things on. If you look at a job, creating something is the most exciting part. There is a natural drive in all of us to create. New, exciting projects really hold people. From a personal perspective, it has been rewarding to be a part of it. At the College, educators have a huge level of creative possibilities – Selkirk has developed this even more than other institutions. (R.J.; MPC)

I think that when a creative project evolves well, the process is transparent in the context of why people are gathered and what the outcomes are. There is a sensitivity toward how people express themselves and the worldview they hold. What drives me to this work is being passionate, and enjoying diversity and challenge. In a sense, it's the teaching and encouragement given to me by my elders. (D.G.; MPC)

We do these projects in addition to our jobs for different reasons…motivation, a desire to learn, community development…strengthening the community. There is a sense of satisfaction in doing that. I love evaluating what worked, what didn't and what I would do next time. (A.H.; MPC)

Creativity probably comes from the individual but is shaped by the group. It is also shaped by limitations and constraints...the building, space, fiscal. It's as though the individual has the spark, and then momentum develops based on the response of the group. (E.L.; MPC)

When you have diversity in the group, you have the ability to flush out an idea and come up with something really incredible. That makes the challenge of diversity worth it. It comes down to our passion. "Be the change to wish to see in the world." What is our real work? That will be different for every person. Some people are passionate about community and volunteer work and it's not about getting paid. What do we value as a society? (L.Z.; MPC)

The Mir Project is deeply intertwined with my desire to be here. I need to see new opportunities and be inspired deeply by what I think is deeply meaningful around me. It is sustaining. In order for it to be meaningful for me, it has to be meaningful for others. (M.L.; MPC)

4.8.1 An Overview of Theme Six

In summary, individuals who feel creatively infused by a project experience greater personal engagement and lend resulting qualities that contribute to positive outcomes. Respondents noted that although creativity may originate from individuals, it is ultimately shaped by the larger group. Diverse (and even opposing) ideas and opinions were seen by some as catalysts which accelerated and strengthened the creative process. (This is not to say that participants did not experience frustration and blockages, at times, in terms of working through project phases with colleagues!) To that end, establishing committed collaborative openness toward new ideas broached by those within and external to the project membership was considered important. There was a sense that ownership of a particular idea was less important than the collective

ability to move the idea forward. Interviewees acknowledged the critical role creativity contributed to the evolution of the individual and subsequent work in all forms. It is clear that the three projects greatly benefitted from the recognition of this aspect and were collectively able to frequently tap into the unique potential of their members.

4.9 Theme Seven - Individual and Organizational Project Outcomes

As the Mir Centre, Guatemala Nursing and Georgia Workforce projects have evolved over time, participants have understandably gained new understandings and skills that they plan to utilize in the future, both professionally and personally. The following interviewees discuss new knowledge acquired through project participation, and consider how these learnings may impact other initiatives they are involved in.

Project participants also highlight a range of organizational outcomes, including "spin-off" projects that are directly or indirectly related to their original work, and that they or others are spearheading. Several of the upcoming planned efforts mentioned are highly collaborative, further develop original project objectives, and include new regional and international partners.

> *One thing that could be different from other people is that it took me some time to understand how the project ran. I kept saying, "Who's in charge of making the decision?" The decisions were made by the group. I'm now much more optimistic about how groups can work. I now hope to start a meditation group at the college. It will be organic, rather than structuring it from the beginning. (E.L.; MPC)*

The Mir Centre has forced me to understand things in new ways, and I'm using ideas that I've developed. I was just in Russia and was able to bring out some of these ideas from the project. In the teaching of literature, for example, I'm interested in how writers formulate the idea of disintegration or failure and how they might be avoided. It's nice to have another depth to your work. In the next phase of Mir, we'll have a more efficient admin structure...one or two people setting an intellectual and spiritual direction. What's important to the people of our community? (M.W.; MPC)

The Georgia Project fits under the internationalization mandate of the College, and has created opportunities for faculty and students to have international experiences. It's a project that brings Selkirk to the world. While the institution has done CIDA projects, they have usually been with Canadian partners. With this, American partners are involved and an equivalent European organization.

Originally, there was just a minimal focus on the centre for teaching and learning. I never expected that the Georgian government would take this country-wide, and now their vision is to have university teachers go through the training centre. Another spin-off is the connection between technical and vocational programming. A group from Denmark is working with this. As long as a project is morphing in a positive way, and the benefit is positive to students, it's good. Georgia is a country we have connections to through history, but it's an amazing country we have connections into the future with as well. This project is directly in line with expanding our connections. (V.K.; GWD)

It's not just Selkirk College...other schools are now also doing similar international projects. We want to work with the BC Academic Health Council to develop research capacity, and streamline processes and placement opportunities. We are moving what we are doing beyond Selkirk and taking it to the provincial level. (M.A.M.; GNP)

I view this whole project as an innovation. A Peace Studies Program, like what we've done as part of the Mir Centre, for example, isn't very common at a college or even universities. It's a whole new discipline that we can hang our hat on, and it distinguishes us across British Columbia and the country. (N.C.; MPC)

The outcomes include the Peace Studies Program and the wonderful Mir Centre building. There is recognition now and knowledge of the Mir Centre through the College and broader community. (D.G.; MPC)

The participants below refer to the need to more effectively use the renovated Mir Centre building in relation to students and the broader community - and to view it as a uniquely inspiring environment for learning and collaboration to occur. As mentioned earlier, interviewees spoke about the effect of their project work on students, referring to either those students who had been involved directly as participants, or those who would be affected through current or future enrolment at Selkirk College. The comments below indicate a tension between the desire to safeguard the building as a college showpiece, as it is the culmination of many years of artisan craftsmanship - created at substantial cost and effort - and the original mandate of the project participants: to create an open gathering place for the purpose of fostering cultures of peace.

When you walk inside the Mir building, the light comes through the windows and upstairs you can see both rivers. If you are there with a group of students, the whole place comes to life. The saddest part is that the building is not used enough. Now, it's used for special occasions, which is the wrong way to look at it. If we used it more, there would be more of an attraction for people to come to the college. I would like to see developments in the use of the building and a more student centred approach to the work of the Mir Centre. (L.W.; MPC)

Woven into the Peace Studies Program is the Mir building. It's a beautiful building, but at times, hard to access. It's unclear what the costs should be to access it. The original view was that it would be a meeting place, but now it is often closed and locked up. There is some possessiveness about it, but not by those that are involved in the Mir Centre. A lot of work went into the building and it is quite beautiful. (D.G.; MPC)

Finally, respondents from the Guatemalan nursing initiative discuss the transformative influence of the project on participating students (and themselves), and comment on how these changes impact their understandings and future choices.

There are 21 indigenous groups in Guatemala...it's fascinating. Students have the chance to see the comparison between groups working well together and those that are fragmented. They also had a meeting with the Canadian Embassy in Guatemala. For this group, it was a highlight to say what they had seen and take it to a more political

level. The students felt empowered. Some from this group will become actively involved in social justice, but even if they're not, they have made connections around privatized health care here and marginalized groups. I was so proud of them when we got back and could hear what they had gained. (J.V.H.; GNP)

This project is exciting and rich and there is so much potential right now. I've done the project for 4 years, and I'm hopeful that all students have had transformative learning events. In their writing, verbal reflections and activities on the ground, it's apparent that their values and how they see others in the world have changed. The project happens in their third year, which means they have their fourth year to integrate the project experience. At that time, we do focus groups. Now, I need to follow up on those people who have been in the workforce for a year and find out where they're at, and how it affected their lives. We're breaking new ground. (M.A.M.; GNP)

With this program, students are learning about community development. It's the only thing that's working, since the Guatemalan government isn't providing anything. Students learn to make the links that this is not an isolated event in Guatemala, that this experience is happening all over the world, including Canada. You meet health care workers who realize it's not about providing medicine. You need to prevent people going into hospitals. One of the important things was making the links…we talked to groups about how our own public health care system is being disintegrated and they said that privatization causes problems. We have to work to keep our public health care system here. The longer this Guatemalan project goes, the bigger draw it has for

students. We need to expand it rather than shrink it. It's beyond a job…it's part of a way of thinking, of linking the world more. This is one way to do it. (J.F.; GNP)

Our whole third year curriculum is based on community empowerment and development. In Guatemala, we focused on sexual and dental health, education and community. From my interpretation of it, when people are marginalized and don't have a social safety net, they out of necessity have to understand what they can do, and what can be done – themselves. We looked at what is happening there and saw parallels with what is happening in Canada. It was a powerful experience. We went with auxillary nurses for women's solidarity groups, and worked with sweatshop women who came in on their only day off to train as nurses. I think I came home with an amazing amount of understanding…more than I expected. (K.B.; GNP)

4.9.1 An Overview of Theme Seven

In summary, individuals (and therefore the groups they formed) were markedly shaped by participating in the Mir Peace Centre, Guatemalan Nursing Project and Georgia Workforce Initiative. Most obviously, new understandings were acquired, whether this included a greater appreciation of other cultures, knowledge related to the practical aspects of implementing a project, or a new sense of spin-off possibilities in other areas. Several interviewees expressed interest in beginning their own initiatives and commented on how having newfound tenets in place had greatly affected them both professionally and personally. Specifically, they referred to possessing a greater interest in such concepts as collaboration, inclusiveness, organic formation

and community impact – and noted that these would be integrated into future and ongoing projects. A new awareness seemed to surface through their work on the projects, which seemed to affect participants on a deeper level than had been noted in their other work settings. Several interviewees commented on a newfound optimism about upcoming collaborative opportunities.

As well as individual effects, participants noted that the projects had resulted in a multitude of broader outcomes affecting the College, regional community, partner stakeholders and outside institutions. In the case of the Mir Project, the tangible product of the actual Peace Centre building was considered a major accomplishment that added great value to the Selkirk College campus, and broader cultural community. (There were concerns, however, regarding the policies and use of the physical space, and an expressed desire to see it fully utilized by students and community members.) The programming resulting from the Centre, including the various Peace Studies Programs and lecture series, as well as institutional partnership opportunities, were also cited as being highly important for their contribution to student learning, community value-adding and situating Selkirk College uniquely among the post-secondary sector.

Similarly, the Guatemalan Nursing Project was considered by participants to have resulted in major outcomes. Nursing students were seen as major beneficiaries of the project, in terms of gaining practical experience while in Guatemala, learning about the connections between Canadian and international health, and understanding with greater depth healthcare needs and community strength in developing countries. Interviewees also noted the extension of these understandings to the local Kootenay community through outreach, focused events and media attention. Additionally, it was obvious that the Selkirk nursing students and instructors had made a tangible difference to the lives and activities of their Guatemalan partners by engaging with them fully on health and political initiatives that they deemed important on a local level.

Finally, the Georgia Workforce Initiative resulted in programming beyond what was originally invisaged. One of the founders noted that the planned teaching and learning centres were expanding across the country. As well as involving the immediate partners from Canada, the United States and Georgia, a new group from Denmark was involved in extension programming based on the original project. Culturally, the connections developed through this project were considered highly important to both Georgian and Canadian participants, given their joint historical experiences and ongoing kinship relationships.

4.10 Chapter Summary: Presenting Multiple Voices

In Chapter 4, interviewees' responses have been grouped and presented according to the themes seemingly most pertinent to the major questions of interest for this study. As the researcher and writer, I've attempted to include the ideas of the participants in a way that reflects their intent and meaning, while providing contextualization for the reader. By doing so, my goal has been to give full voice to the interviewees, as key participants in the evolution of this project, while keeping in mind that my perspective, however subjective, also has a core place within the interpretation of the study. In the following concluding chapter, I extend the ideas presented in Chapter 4, integrating my views with those of others, regarding the results and implications of the interviews. Essentially, I consider the implications of the main themes, in terms of generating potential best practices as illustrated by successful approaches taken by participants involved in the three case studies.

CHAPTER 5 – Conclusion: Considerations for Best Practice and Appreciation

5.1 The Purpose of this Chapter

Chapter 5 serves to integrate the various questions, themes and findings explored in previous chapters – particularly Chapter 4 - in a summative way. To review, Chapter 1 of this dissertation presents the educational, environmental, historical and personal context relevant to the study. In Chapter 2, an overview of the literature related to social constructionism, appreciative inquiry, creativity, organizational leadership, collaboration and culture is discussed. Chapter 3 provides detailed information regarding the methodology of the study, including question development, research ethics board processes, interview procedures, as well as detailed backgrounds on each of the three case studies: The Mir Centre for Peace, Guatemala Nursing Project and Republic of Georgia Workforce Development Initiative.

The focus of Chapter 4 is the roles and descriptions of the interviewees, and their responses to the questions, particularly those answers that relate directly to the core topics of interest. The responses are grouped together according to key themes identified as being potentially most relevant, and are interspersed with ongoing interpretation of the comments. A summary of each theme attempts to review the main points presented by participants.

In the conclusion, Chapter 5, the findings are discussed, with the aim of highlighting potential best practices that can be applied to complex organizational projects, both inside and outside of academia. These practices are derived from the main interview and interpretative threads presented in Chapter 4, and are supplemented by specific interview segments from the case studies.

Essentially, the three projects studied as part of this research all exemplify success; that is, they are ongoing, have met and surpasses their original goals, and demonstrate strong potential for future growth. The ideas for best practice in Chapter 5 encompass the main strategies that have been implemented successfully by project participants – as well as *expanded strategies developed by considering areas of challenge or potential gaps* indicated by the interviews. Included in the section designated for each suggested best practice, there is reference to how they relate to the projects. Specifically, which areas of best practice were utilized as part of the project work according to ideas gathered through the interviews, and to what degree? Were there elements of best practice that could be strengthened? What are the perceived benefits of utilizing such practices?

Additionally, in Chapter 5, ideas for potential future research following similar threads of interest are presented. The final section of the chapter, the epilogue, discusses the project in relation to the more themes addressed in the introductory dissertation chapter. In particular, the final project recommendations are applied in theory to the International Digital Film Project, which was the original impetus for this research study. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of my own professional changes that have accompanied and been a result of my work on this project.

5.2 The Art of Project Design

> *To call a work of architecture or design beautiful is to recognize it as a rendition of values critical to our flourishing, a transubstantiation of our individual ideals in a material medium.*
>
> - Alain de Botton, Author, *The Architecture of Happiness*

Symposium Held at the Mir Peace Centre Aboriginal Arbour

This photograph, taken under the traditional aboriginal arbour on the Mir Centre grounds, shows participants involved in discussion during a symposium. The large wooden arbour, designed as a sheltered structure open to the surrounding landscape, is made mainly of fir and cedar and has two levels of built-in, connected benches situated inside the circular perimeter. Constructed to embody the tradition of the aboriginal "talking circle", all of the seating faces inward toward a central hearth.

The use of a circle to create a structural forum for dialogue, as noted by the Canadian Heritage Community Foundation website, is an important theme within aboriginal culture, representing interconnectedness, continuity and equality among those who join it. By its very nature, the talking circle encourages non-hierarchical and inclusive communication: each participant is encouraged to speak fully and listen carefully to others in turn in order to build consensus and increase understanding. Multiple voices reflecting multiple realities are expressed without censorship or criticism, offering new ways of seeing and behaving – paralleling tenets of social constructionist thought. The participants in the picture shown represent diverse groups from the college and surrounding community with varying cultural, spiritual, academic and professional backgrounds. They bring wide-ranging strengths and interests that have been utilized individually and collectively as the Mir Project has evolved.

Like the Mir Centre, the other two projects included in this dissertation bring together diverse members keenly interested in building initiatives they deem socially valuable. That is, participants in the Georgia Workforce and Guatemalan Nursing Projects have also come together through a common focus: to undertake innovative work that provides educational, cultural and economic benefits to local and global communities. In this way, the three case studies are examples of what essayist Alain de Botton refers to in his quote on the previous page: they represent "…a rendition of values critical to our flourishing" – the manifestation of ideals and possibilities into forms that contribute positively to society.

Throughout this project, and for many years previous, I have been intrigued by the concepts of design and beauty, specifically in relation to how they relate to the work we do collaboratively in organizations. By integrating quotes by writers of fiction, artists and other cultural "creatives" with the more traditional sections of this dissertation; by including quality photography of the

project participants and projects; and by drafting this written work in a way that expresses my own aesthetic vision, I have attempted to explore how artistic themes can be related to the work we do in the "organizational trenches". Frequently, it seems as though there is a disconnect between what is considered to be creative work resulting in design and that which takes place inside the confines of post-secondary education and other formalized social institutions.

It is as though little credence is given to the fact that successful organizational projects, whether focused on curriculum development, institutional partnerships, student experiences abroad or other areas, are frequently infused with creativity, and exhibit qualities that can be even considered beautiful - just as the aboriginal arbour on the Mir Centre grounds expresses this quality in physical form. In *The Architecture of Happiness* (2006), de Botton discusses French writer Stendhal's assertion that "…beauty is the *promise* of happiness" (p.98), and notes that, regardless of the wide range of goals that people pursue, or the disciplines they are involved in, it is the potentiality inherent in a creation that expresses individual and/or collective values that provides a sense of beauty.

De Botton differentiates Stendhal's concept of beauty from "…an academic preoccupation with aesthetics…integrating it instead with the qualities we need to prosper as whole human beings (p.98). It is these qualities, so exemplified by ideas generated through social constructionism and appreciative inquiry, that David Cooperrider seems to refer to when he asks whether beauty can be found in every organization, even if embroiled in conflict (Section 2.2). And it is these qualities that have been brought to fruition through the work done by participants engaged in the Mir Centre, Guatemalan Nursing Project and Georgia Workforce Initiative.

5.3 Best Practices Indicated by the Study

5.3.1 Integrating Projects into Strategic Plans

Not surprisingly, feedback from participants in this study indicates that a relationship exists between institutional strategic planning processes, project initiation and success. Projects that are aligned with formalized strategic plans, in terms of having the potential of meeting defined mission, vision and values statements can more easily garner support. As one interviewee noted, "…the college saw the project as contributing to the plan and review, which helped to make it credible. Other people began to see it in a different light, and the president made reference to the strategic plan. A good plan makes these things possible because it is timely. That sense of timing is important" (Section 4.3).

When developing and revising formal plans, organizations benefit from focused discussion regarding the types of projects that could develop in the future or *are emerging* within the organization - given contextual factors such as timing, student programming demand, current social/political issues, budget trends and competitor initiatives. As Gergen, McNamee and Barrett (2001) observe, embracing a new idea equates with embracing new relationships, while rejecting an idea is an act of undermining one's community. In effective organizations, a planning culture is established which is receptive to new possibilities, and, in fact, perceives them as critical to organizational growth and sustenance.

Strategic planning generally involves many stakeholders from varying sectors, and eventually results in defining key mission, values and directions statements. Planning processes benefit by integrating opportunities for discussion among all levels of the organization regarding

potential ideas for project development – even those individuals located further away from the centre - without limiting future possibilities. This creates more of a communicative bridge between different levels of the organization in regard to project conceptualization, sparks new possibilities, and increases understanding of the strategic plan in place.

Responses from the interviews indicated that projects fitting into formalized plans tend to generate greater support, both within and external to the organization. Therefore, in order facilitate growth and development, a strategic plan needs to define key areas of importance but be sufficiently open so that innovative but viable project ideas can be brought into the structure. One respondent commented on the relationship between projects and plans in this way: "In terms of the strategic plan affecting projects or vice versa, there's a bit of both going on. The projects for which we have demonstrated there are strategic goals continue and have support. I worry about activities that don't fit into plans and are individually driven" (Section 4.3).

5.3.2 Creating Effective Project Teams

Successful projects gain early support from key members of the organization (often at high levels of the hierarchy), due to deliberate and consistent effort on the part of project founders. Core project participants also encourage the involvement of a range of individuals representing different cultures - inside and outside of the organization. Over time, a diversity of participants greatly contributes to the strength and support of the project, and has a "ripple" effect that spreads support to new sectors. By creating temporary teams with more simplified roles and minimal categories, there is greater potential for effectively working with specific and changing

organizational needs (Wheatley, 2006). Overall, for this type of teamwork to succeed, the organization must be agile and fluid, with less of a preoccupation with hierarchical rigidity.

Creating project teams without a standard hierarchical structure often requires an unlearning of sorts, as most are used to a top-down management approach, where there is a clear leader and subordinates. One interviewee involved with the Mir Centre noted that, when she began to working with the project, she kept asking who was "in charge" of making the decisions. After some time, her concept of group process shifted substantially as she realized that the decisions were made *by the group* rather than by one individual in charge. (Refer to Section 4.9)

When a manager within a project team is deemed necessary, the concept of what a manager does may need to be revisited. In more flexible, network-oriented approaches, a manager may serve more as a facilitator for the group, providing coordination and information, rather than directing the actions of others. Tasks within this more open framework are not delegated without consent, but instead offered to participants as possibilities, so that they can choose according to their individual strengths. Guidelines are not set externally, but with input from the group, and evolve as the needs of the project progress. Such approaches generally have an empowering effect on project teams, as members move toward a common goal with a sense of equality and personal investment. Because of the organic evolution of tasks, guidelines and roles, participants feel a greater sense of autonomy and feel less imposed upon.

Even within this new approach to team building, challenges can arise regarding roles and responsibilities. When this occurs, a review of the team itself can be helpful, and members may choose to shift roles sporadically. Another helpful element is training participants in areas that are "weak spots" so the group's skill set is broadened and equalize. Making allowances for smaller, working groups to form may help to showcase strengths within the group. In particular,

the Mir Project members discussed the benefit of moving from larger committees to temporary sub-committees formed with ten or fewer members.

Conflict can also be a healthy component of the creative project process, particularly if there is transparent, ongoing communication regarding individual/group interests and goals. Respondents noted that they had experienced dissent at various points of the project process, but that continual, engaged dialogue regarding their shared purpose kept them motivated to reach understanding and resolution. Participants from the Guatemalan Nursing Project noted that they had broached dissent with other faculty in the department (who initially were not involved and had concerns) by making a concerted effort to bring them into the circle of the project as participants. They had clearly found what Gergen et al (2001) term "superordinate" or unified goals, which helped them to understand that they were part of a larger, defined group with shared interests.

5.3.3 Maximizing Personal Investment

Highly motivated participants (such as those interviewed for this study) who make powerful contributions to a project have often been involved previously in related work, volunteer or educational efforts. When determining group members, and soliciting support, deliberate effort can be directed toward inquiring about the interests, history and future goals of potential members - and sharing this information if appropriate. Not only can this facilitate increased engagement, but it can also reveal additional strengths and skills that participants can offer and indicate possible new directions for the project.

The reality is that, due to lack of training, or financial and schedule-based constraints, the types of important conversations that greatly influence member participation and project success over time often never occur – or, if so, only at a superficial level. The principles of appreciative inquiry, as discussed in Section 2.6 and used to develop the questions used in this research study, can effectively guide interviews and discussions with individuals and groups prior and during their project participation. As demonstrated by the types of responses provided by the participants in Chapter 4, generative conversations based on the process of strengths-based, affirmative inquiry can result in powerful understandings and ongoing commitment.

Many of the interviewees stated directly that their project work fulfilled a deep need they had to express their individual and communal values, and to help manifest positive change in the world. A project interviewee involved with the Nursing Project stated that, "…people come to their workplace with a passion for something. It often flavours everything they're doing and teaching, and they're looking for an opportunity to put an emphasis on that" (Section 4.8). Many perceive such work as being part of their own personal and professional development, as well as that of the organization. They embody Tolstoy's recognition that "Joy can be real only if people look upon their life as a service, and have a definite object outside themselves and their personal happiness."

Leaders would do well to listen carefully to the interests and goals of organizational members, as having such ideas fully listened to and realized greatly affects attitudes and the quality of work done. In the longer term, this type of consistent, authentic listening has the added benefit of affecting succession planning and increasing employee retention. Clearly, as the emotional investment of employees in their work is strengthened and validated, they feel a

sense of belonging, of personal ownership or investment toward the organization that inspires them to stay and contribute (Wheatley, 2006).

5.3.4 Visioning as an Ongoing Process

Creative visioning is important to the evolution of a project - at the start of a project and at critical times throughout the process. People have diverse views of how the project will unfold, and these need to be expressed, acknowledged and integrated into the project planning. Differences are not to be avoided, but rather, can contribute to the creative process and strengthen the project.

Interviewees stated that they valued having the opportunity to express their unique ideas on how the project could unfold to other members of the group. As a member of the Mir Centre expressed, "If you can accept everyone's vision, fine-tune what that means for them, and then look at it collectively, you come up with something quite strong" (Section 4.5). Openly discussing varying ideas regarding project vision also serves as critical acknowledgement of different individual goals. These differences, particularly when discussed in advance, can be used as building blocks, instead of future obstacles. Ultimately, visioning can serves as a way to intimately understand each individual's needs and expectations, and create an enhanced sense of unity and belonging among members.

Prior to the visioning process, individuals can be encouraged to spend time independently reflecting on open-ended questions regarding their personal and professional objectives in relation to the project. This may involve journaling about ongoing interests, reviewing relevant

past experiences considered energizing and important, and defining hopes for the future. This personal inventory work primes the individual for the group's visioning process.

A key element to an effective visioning process is maintaining open acceptance of participant input. Individuals should not feel the need to justify his or her particular vision of the future or explain how it could happen. (That can be handled later during the strategic planning process.) During this phase, everyone should be encouraged to stretch his or her imagination, devoid of criticism. This approach often leads to spontaneous ideas as noted by the following interviewee: "Many in the group saw a larger picture of what would happen. In many ways, the last community council meeting we had worked. All ideas were welcome and sometimes there was a spark of surprise" (Section 4.5).

For longer, multi-year projects, participants and goals will change over time and this needs to be addressed in a focused way as part of an ongoing visioning/action process. Long-term projects undergo periods of shift during which major re-alignment may be necessary - involving dialogue on varying levels. Like the participants themselves, projects experience natural cycles of growth, stabilization and lag. A member of the Mir Centre commented on this state, but emphasized the importance of focusing on the strengths of the work done so far: "…we're working through the bureaucratic period and getting organized for the next phase. There have been periods of gloom around bureaucracy, and visions that didn't mesh. At times, there has been a lack of energy and not enough finances to do very much. But, just look at what we've accomplished" (Section 4.5).

5.3.5 Inviting the Unexpected through all Phases

Planning is a valuable part of the development process, but even with exemplary preparation, the phases of a project will, at times, unfold unpredictably and produce outcomes varying from original expectations. Like other creative processes, new elements will appear, expected resources will shift or evaporate, and unknown complications will challenge even the most efficient processes. The most effective way to respond is to expect the unexpected, and remain flexible, collaborative and open to the greater possibilities in the face of change.

Participants engaged with the Georgia Project, for example, noted the need for flexibility when working in conjunction with international partners possessing varying agendas and modes of working. In particular, when abroad in Georgia, members made a concerted effort to adapt and respond to the lead of host collaborators.

Defined structures, such as roles, strategic plans and funding models that suit a project initially will need to be revisited and adapted to shifting realities. To respond to this type of ongoing change, Barrett (2000) encourages an "aesthetic of surrender", which involves embracing risk and letting go of the familiar. This can be cultivated through an organization by allowing members to explore the edge of competence, creating incremental disruptions that force new paths to be opened, and developing learning relationships that both challenge and support. Participants involved with the Guatemalan Nursing Project referred to the shifting parameters of the project, given the range of international partners, students and stakeholders involved and the need to be open to new relationships and possibilities for project activities.

5.3.6 Working Well Across Cultures

When working cross-culturally, within or outside of an organization, focused discussion and reflection regarding communication styles, cultural biases, project expectations and collaborative approaches are beneficial prior and during project development. Working with other cultural groups on the basis of being equal partners, rather than having one group direct or "teach" the other is critical, particularly when working in the partner's home region.

From the responses provided by the interviewees surveyed for this study, it is clear that equitable and balanced relationship building with internal and external stakeholders, and the resulting formation of interdependent networks were important components of success. (Refer to Section 4.6.) Information sharing which was non-directive, and non-hierarchical seemed to evolve over time amidst the activities engaged in by members of the Mir Peace Centre, Guatemalan Nursing Project and Georgia Workforce Development Initiative. This approach potentially acted as a deterrent against outmoded, top-down type power struggles, and when leaders emerged - as evidenced by comments from interviewees involved in all three projects - the processes involved seemed clear and openly communicated.

Common to the three case studies was an acceptance of the richness and value of the varied cultures represented by participants involved in the projects. While this may seem obvious, it bears mentioning. Many interviewees commented not only on the importance of understanding and appreciating the diversity of their own "cultural home", but on the keen interest they had in meeting others from varying cultural groups and experiencing their regions of origin.

Both the Guatemalan Nursing Project and Georgia Workforce Initiative involve participants travelling abroad to work extensively and directly with multiple foreign partners. In the case of

the Guatemalan Project, in particular, Selkirk College nursing students are uniquely situated to witness the challenging conditions local residents and caregivers experience in terms of medical care, education and general living conditions. One nursing program instructor stated that students "… have the chance to see the comparison between groups working well together and those that are fragmented. They also had a meeting with the Canadian Embassy in Guatemala. For this group, it was a highlight to say what they had seen and take it to a more political level" (Section 4.9).

It is evident that, by acting as external observers and providing care when required, the nurses provide valuable support to the initiatives their international partners are involved in. They are then able to affect change through pertinent contact with organizations such as government agencies. However, this type of action must be carefully coordinated in tandem with the partner.

5.3.7 Making Milestones Matter

Through the lifetime of the project, regular group celebration of milestones deemed critical reinforces group solidarity and purpose, marks achievement of goals, reignites passion, and creates an opportunity for increased community involvement. Providing individuals with the opportunity to share their experiences, of both special events and their ongoing project activities through discussion, writing and other modes can be powerful and affirming. Individuals often come to project work with a passion, and seek to be fully engaged in work they consider personally and socially significant. They value full and meaningful collaboration with others who share the same general goals, even though they understand that the ways people work, and

their specific vision may differ from their own. The respondents consistently made reference to key events they had shared with other participants and the communal conversations and understandings resulting from those experiences. (Refer to Section 4.7)

As Cooperrider and Whitney (1999) state, interpretation matters. It is key, for continued motivation and engagement, that individuals have the opportunity to gather in formal and informal ways in order to share and understand their experiences within the context of the larger project. If organizations are made and imagined in conversation, a concerted effort needs to be placed on creating a forum for engagement – and for highlighting those ideas that are growth oriented, energizing and transformational.

Creating celebratory opportunities can be a challenge for organizations eager to move forward in the midst of competition and financial necessity. Taking defined periods to reflect, share and envision can seem like an impediment given immediate needs, particularly if it is difficult at times to understand the "big picture" of the group's overall direction; additionally, such activities may be perceived by some as forced or unnatural. Without them, however, project participants can wander toward project goals, without recognizing in a comprehensive manner whether they have been achieved, or to what degree. They are denied the opportunity to recognize accomplishment and honour collective progress.

Both group and individual milestones, based on meeting specific goals or marking important activities, create a sense of shared history and solidarity for project participants. This allows deeper bonds to form, and, over time, further enhances commitment, trust and engagement. Of the three case studies included in this dissertation, it was the Mir Peace Centre participants who repeatedly discussed the communal and personal value of marking pivotal events. They referred to the way in which activities such as the annual anniversary of the Mir Centre Blessing

Ceremony informed their understanding of what had been accomplished over time, why they were continuing to be involved, and how they defined themselves as members of a collaborative team.

5.4 Extending the Current Study

This study focuses on three case studies, all with an international focus, based at Selkirk College, British Columbia. Although the majority of the respondents interviewed were from the Castlegar region or other parts of Canada, several interviewees were external partners located overseas. It would extend the study to include additional project participants from the Republic of Georgia and Guatemala representing a range of additional organizations, both governmental and non-governmental. Additionally, it would be interesting to continue the interview process over a period of years with the same (and new) participants, perhaps on an annual basis. All three projects continue to evolve in new ways, and I am aware that there have been ongoing shifts in structure, participants and goals since my original interviews were completed.

Additionally, the recommendations identified on the basis of the interview data and described in this chapter are meant as practical strategies beneficial to the collaborative project process. Formalized research on the results of the application of these recommendations at different phases of project work within varied types of organizations would be useful – and provide information regarding optimal implementation scheduling, sequencing, training, and participant perspectives. It would also be intriguing to apply the recommendations fully to the three projects already studied; that is, to supplement and extend the strategies currently used.

It is my belief that the recommendations offered in this study can be, with appropriate participant training and preparation, effectively applied to complex projects across diverse organizations - including those in educational, business and non-governmental sectors – with positive results. Although they may be considered standard practice, or even common sense, the reality is that such strategies are typically applied sporadically, partially or not at all – not as a byproduct of negligence, but rather due to lack of knowledge, training or experience.

My original idea was to make a documentary film as part of this doctoral work to accompany the dissertation, highlighting the people, geographical regions and effects of the three projects. This was not implemented due to the time constraints of the other aspects of this project. However, the potential for such a film beckons into the future – not only would it document and share the impressive work being done, but it would serve to publicize the college programs, the expertise of the participants and the needs of the international project partners.

5.5 Epilogue – The Project (and Garden) Come Full Circle

In the introduction to this dissertation, a metaphor was presented to compare this research project to the design and development process of my garden in Nelson, British Columbia, where I lived and worked when this project began. I likened the garden to this Ph.D. project in terms of making choices, weaving together diverse elements, embedding components within a larger context, and collaborating to achieve a common goal. As this final section of the dissertation is written, it is natural to reflect on where this project started and the process of its evolution.

Just as this project concludes, over the next month, I will be returning to our Nelson home – now sold - to pack and move our belongings to our new base of Montreal, Quebec, Canada. The

garden will now be cared for and enjoyed by a new family moving to Nelson from Vancouver. Although elements in the garden may change over time, my hope is that the foundation designed will provide beauty and use to those who live with it. Even though my direct involvement with the garden has ended, the understandings gained from the process are powerful and ongoing.

In some ways, there is a similar sense of this doctoral project as it comes to a natural conclusion. The intent from the beginning of this study was to explore different ways of understanding and participating in project work, in relation to my own experiences and that of my colleagues. As I read articles and began writing, I reflected on my own work as a college administrator in international education, and began to uncover the experiences of many others by interviewing them about their work with the Mir Peace Centre, Republic of Georgia Workforce Development Initiative and Guatemalan Nursing Project.

As the interviews progressed, and I continued reading in subject areas related to the project, unexpected discoveries began to unfold. First, I realized that the interviews, developed specifically with appreciative inquiry concepts in mind, were often powerful and affecting – both for the participants and myself. The process of engaging in constructive dialogue with interviewees about work that *deeply mattered to them* not only contributed important insights regarding collaborative project work, but often seemed to bring a new depth to our relationship as colleagues.

Second, as I learned more about the projects, continued to relate them to the literature and started writing the interpretive section of the dissertation, it became increasingly apparent that the work being done at Selkirk College on these complex, long-term initiatives - often undertaken by faculty and staff on a volunteer basis 'off the sides of their desks' - has profound

benefits, both at a local and global level. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to witness and document their work, and admire their commitment.

Most importantly, when I began to listen to the taped interviews from this study, in order to group participant responses into themes for Chapter 4, it became apparent to me that multiple, defined strategies deliberately applied prior to, during, and following the project process could have a profound effect on outcomes. The three case studies included in this study each demonstrate beneficial effects due to the implementation of such strategies; however, success could have been even further enhanced by applying a greater number of these approaches to each project in a thorough, coordinated way.

When I reflect on the Selkirk College International Digital Film Program (Section 1.5) that I co-founded in 2007, and which was the motivation behind exploring collaborative projects for this study, I now have an increased understanding of the program development processes, challenges and outcomes. This study and dissertation were initiated with the intention of inquiring into the factors responsible for facilitating project success – in part, due to my perception that the Film project had not fully achieved its potential. Now, in retrospect, when I consider the seven recommendations included in this final chapter, it is obvious to me how the timely use of specific strategies could have significantly enhanced results.

For example, the program was situated well within the institutional strategic plan, with its emphasis on interdisciplinary studies, community engagement, international student opportunities and curriculum innovation. (Refer to Sections 1.8 and 5.3.1) On this basis, the program proposal had been successfully presented and accepted within the college community, being formally approved by the Education Council and Curriculum Committee. It certainly had informal support from members of senior management. However, it would have been highly

beneficial to have garnered the ongoing involvement of individuals at the highest level of college management as members of our original Film Program Advisory Committee. When interviewed, the founders of the Mir Peace Centre emphasized the critical importance of engaging the Selkirk College Presidents (both current and past) from the inception of the project as members of the initial planning committee and then through the following phases on subsequent committees.

The International Digital Film Program would have also benefited from a greater focus on in-depth initial and ongoing visioning discussions between the founders and other members of the planning committee. As explained earlier in Chapter 1, as the project evolved past the initial stages, it seemed as though participants increasingly developed different ideas about the program content, goals and day –to-day operations – providing an increasingly challenging tension which required clear and directed communication, perhaps with the assistance of a facilitator.

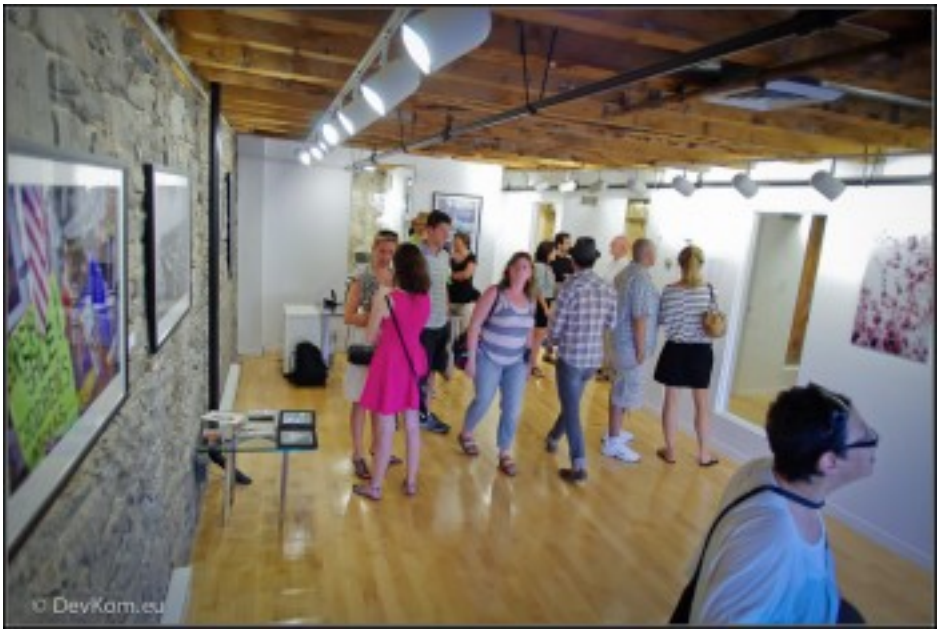
It was not that film program participants needed to conform to the same goals, but rather that understanding each other's perspectives and accompanying motivations was required for group cohesion. And since we hadn't prepared for the inevitable reality of shifting outcomes and sudden complications, as noted in Section 5.3.5, we were caught 'off-guard' in the midst of the whirlwind which encompasses the first year of any new program – thus further derailing group unity when it was most needed. Overall, the challenges faced during the implementation of the program could have been greatly alleviated if we had spent time during the development phase utilizing the strategies recommended earlier in this chapter. Unequivocably, my involvement in the creation of the Film Program provided valuable experience related to group dynamics which can be integrated into future projects.

Finally, this Ph.D. project has been a catalyst for my own professional change. From Head of International Education, I moved next to a position as Dean at a large private university based in Singapore. Gradually, over the following year, I became intrigued by the collaborative possibilities offered through starting my own consulting firm focused on international education projects, institutional partnerships and student mobility. In November of 2010, I launched *Weston Edell International Education Consultants*, which brings together a large group of experienced academics and consultants based around the globe with diverse strengths and interests in academic program development, faculty recruitment, project management, student advising, partnership development and other specialties. Although we have recently just begun, interest to this point has been positive, with current project inquiries coming from Canada, Qatar, The United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia.

This summer, as a companion project to the educational consulting firm, I am launching a new initiative, *The New Centre for Languages and Arts*. Located in a mid-19th century building in the most historical section of the city, the Centre provides courses in languages, theatre, photography and film studies to both local and international students, as well as special lectures and workshops on various arts and education related subjects to the community. A gallery space focused on contemporary photography by emerging and established global artists is an integral component of the location, and is open to the public on a daily basis. The mandate of the gallery is to exhibit international photographers who are exploring current social, environmental and political themes.

Newly renovated, the interior spaces are designed to highlight the historic qualities of the original building, which include stone walls, traditional beams and wooden floors, while effectively integrating contemporary, art-filled classroom spaces fitted with large glass panels

overlooking the gallery area. The purpose of this configuration is to allow students engaged in language, film or acting classes to fully experience the aesthetic qualities of the Centre as a integral component of their learning experience. Future directions of the centre may include incorporating activities such as online newsletters, film festivals, author readings and teacher training.



The New Centre for Languages and Arts

In effect, both of the projects I am currently engaged in provide opportunities to integrate my professional areas of expertise and personal interests, as well as those of many friends and colleagues. As examples of collaborative international projects in action, the educational consulting firm and the Centre of Languages and Arts located in Old Montreal bring together individuals from around the globe to work together on challenging activities that have the potential to facilitate positive social change. With the understandings and skills I have gained through my studies in the Tilburg/Taos Program, I am motivated to approach both projects with a

sense of strategy, optimism and creativity. As well, I plan to apply this evolving approach to future consulting projects, writing and teaching.

In the first part of this dissertation (Section 1.1) an overview of the dissertation was provided, and an invitation was offered to the reader to engage as a co-constructing participant in the creation of this project. It has been enriching for me to receive feedback on this dissertation, in terms of reader response to the goals, macro-content, document structure and social constructionist subtext. The academic response has been varied, at times, to such a degree that I wondered whether the same document was read. Ultimately, however, criticisms made regarding this work have resulted in a stronger, more aligned document with defined intentions and a clearer structure.

The range of responses I've received have also provoked considerable reflection on my part regarding the nature of traditional and emerging research modes within the institutions we inhabit. Perhaps, as an example of effective practice in collaborative project-making, we are at our best when we are open to the dissent of others, and work consciously together to negotiate new ways and structures by which meaning can be established. Lather (1991) notes that questioning can be seen as an effort to break out of the limitations of inadequate category systems toward a theory able to include the complexities of people and their cultures. I intend to continue this process of questioning, in collaboration with others, as new areas of interest present themselves.

And so, to the garden, to this particular project, and to you, my reader, I bid an appreciative 'au revoir'.

True as the sun's own work, but more refined,

It tells of love behind the artist's eye,

Of sweet companionships with earth and sky,

And summers stored, the sunshine of the mind.

- James Russell Lowell

Cara and her son, Max, in Montreal, Canada

FINI

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